

# NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY

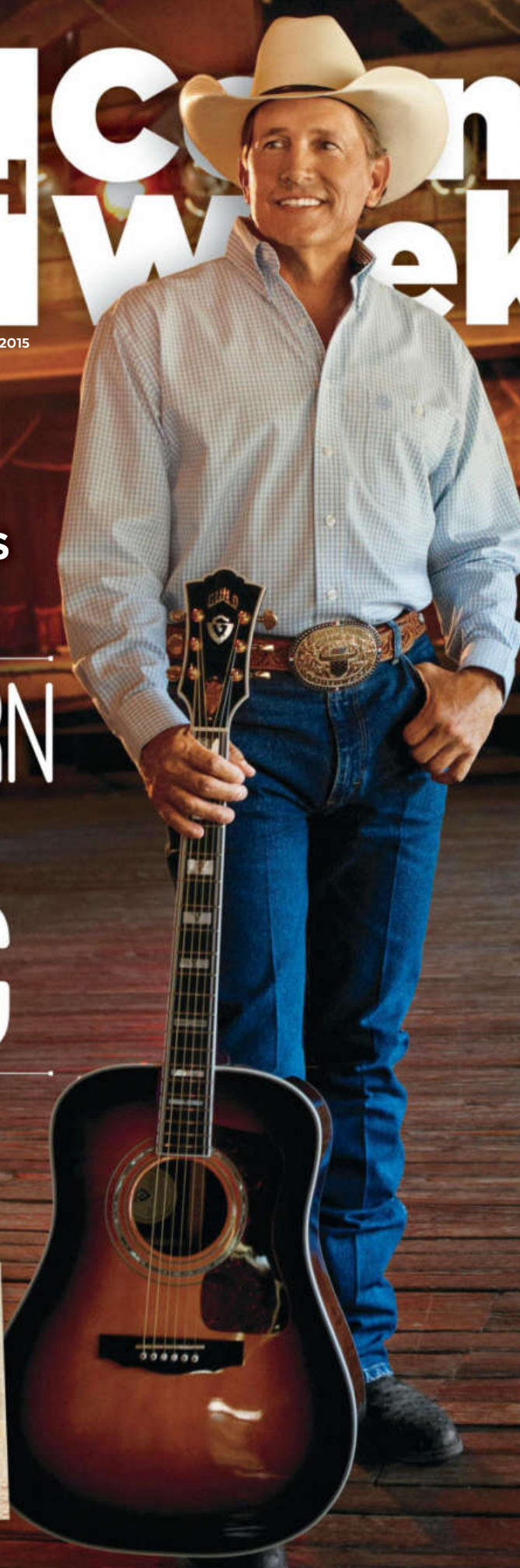
COUNTRY FOR LIFE | OCTOBER 26, 2015

**GEORGE STRAIT**  
IS BACK ON  
THE CHARTS  
AND THE  
STAGE

RETURN  
OF THE  
KING

**PLUS!**

GO INSIDE THE  
MAKING OF HIS  
ARTISTIC NEW  
ALBUM COVER!



**CMA AWARDS PREVIEW  
AND THE  
NOMINEES  
ARE...**

PAGE 24

**NASH  
NEXT  
ARTIST  
SPOTLIGHT  
COLE  
SWINDELL**

**SAM HUNT  
THROWS  
A "HOUSE  
PARTY"**

**DEAR DIARY:  
CRAIG  
MORGAN  
AND WIFE  
SHARE  
OVERSEAS  
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**2010 SATURDAY,  
OCT. 23**



## Grand Night for Blake

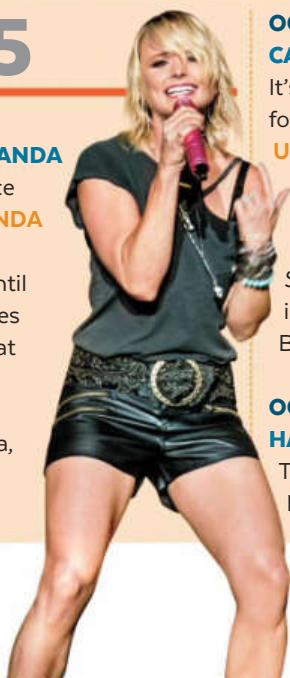
**BLAKE SHELTON** received one of his biggest career milestones when he was inducted as an official member of the Grand Ole Opry, Oct. 23, 2010, during a ceremony at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry House. Blake's buddy **TRACE ADKINS** did the honors, formally inducting Blake as he handed him the Opry Member

Award in front of a packed house. After opening the show with his hit "All About Tonight," Blake shared his thoughts about becoming an Opry member as he spoke from the hallowed stage. "I get the same feeling when I come to the Opry as when I see one of my heroes. I am in awe," Blake said. "To me, the Grand Ole Opry is an artist and I'm really proud to be one of its songs." Blake, who made his Grand Ole Opry debut in 2001, later performed "She Wouldn't Be Gone" and teamed with Trace on their then-recent hit, "Hillbilly Bone," before appropriately closing with "Home."

**2015**

### OCT. 19: CHASING MIRANDA

Your last chance to catch **MIRANDA LAMBERT** on tour, at least until next year, comes with her show at the Scotiabank Saddledome in Calgary, Alberta, Canada on Oct. 19.



### OCT. 23: CARRIE ON as she releases her

much-anticipated new album, *Storyteller*, on Oct. 23. The album includes the hit single "Smoke Break," plus a dozen additional tunes.



### OCT. 25: HALL INDUCTIONS

The newest members of the Country Music Hall of Fame—**JIM ED BROWN**

and **THE BROWNS, THE OAK RIDGE BOYS** and musician **GRADY MARTIN**—will be officially welcomed at the Hall of Fame's Medallion Ceremony on Oct. 25. Jim Ed and Grady will be inducted posthumously.



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October 26, 2015

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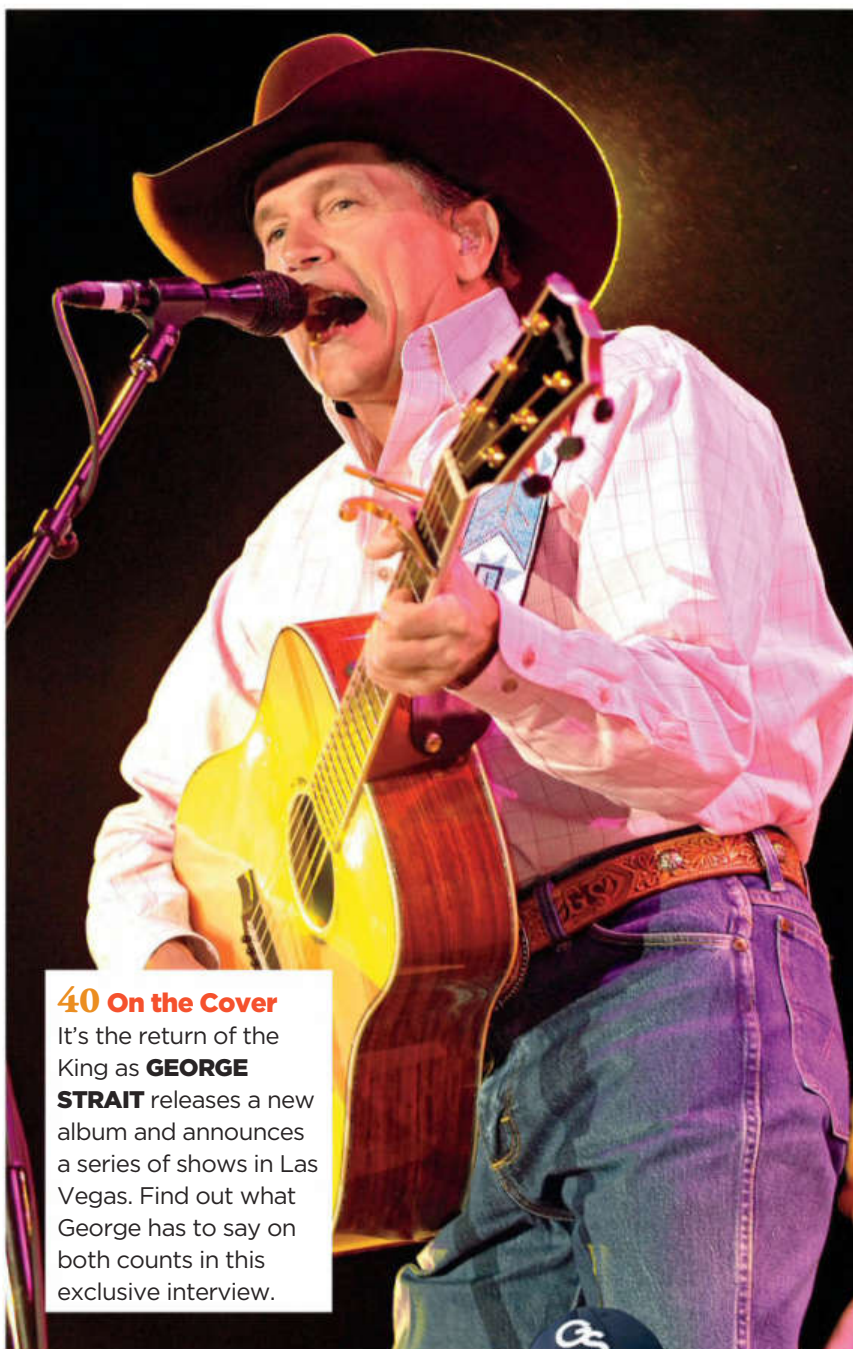
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It's the return of the King as **GEORGE STRAIT** releases a new album and announces a series of shows in Las Vegas. Find out what George has to say on both counts in this exclusive interview.

## PLUS!

**NASH  
NEXT**

### 27 COLE SWINDELL

The Georgia-born singer has an amazing story to tell about his rise from merchandise hawker to hit-making star.



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## FROM THE EDITOR



### *Dear Readers,*

We have been waiting with bated breath here at the offices of *Nash Country Weekly* for the announcement of George Strait's new album. So when we finally got the call, we sent senior writer and George Strait aficionado Bob Paxman to Las Vegas to sit down with the King of Country. George never said he was retiring completely, only from touring, so the fact that he is putting out new music should come as no surprise. George

also has said that he would leave the door open for special events—and now we have a special event that brings George to Las Vegas. So check out our cover story on George and get the lowdown on his new music.

In the Nash Next section, we catch up with hitmaker Cole Swindell, who has been busy out on the road. And while Cole is having a ball being out on tour, we got him to talk about the upsides and downsides of success and fame.

We have come to the end of the road with our four-part series on The Oak Ridge Boys. We wrap the series with a portrait of lead singer Joe Bonsall, who has written more than a few books in his spare time. Joe talked to us about what drives him to continue putting pen to paper. We hope you enjoyed getting to know the guys individually as much as we enjoyed working with them.

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands Oct. 26, when we take a "Smoke Break" with Carrie Underwood.

### SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

LISA KONICKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

## FROM THE READER



*Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think!*

Letters, Nash Country Weekly, 506 2nd. Ave. South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210

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Please include your name, address and daytime phone number with all correspondence. Nash Country Weekly assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material, including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork, manuscripts and letters. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

### THE GENTLE GIANT

I sincerely appreciated the Keith Urban and Lee Brice articles from your Sept. 7 issue. Allow me to offer some insight into a common factor in their success: their love and appreciation for "The

Gentle Giant," Don Williams. Lee listed "I Believe in You" for his wife Sara's mix tape, while Keith played "Making Memories of Us" in Don Williams' styling (including his guitar rendition of the Chuck Cochran piano stair-step

phrasing from "Love Me Over Again"). Keith and fellow artist Josh Turner (who includes a Williams song on every album) actively embrace a key Williams tenet in their own personal lives: "Never put anything (including music) above your spouse, family or faith!" And all three men will keep their fans forever, as Don has, by this maxim: "My idea of country music is as a FAMILY form of entertainment." Thank you for your excellent interviews!  
**CHERI STRAND BURNSED**  
Fletcher, Okla.

### FACEBOOK

She's 24 already?! [Aubrie Sellers] Wasn't she just dancing around in her mom's video a few years ago?! Wow, I feel old! Beautiful, definitely sounds a little like her mom, gorgeous voice!  
**MELISSA MCGURK**

Thank you, Nash Next, for the great article on Josh Thompson. I've seen and met Josh in Nashville. He is an awesome country artist, he loves his fans and we love him. I'm excited for his new release, *Change*. His performance on the Opry was wonderful! Loved his vocals (heard every word), the lyrics, the rhythm, great instrumentals—there is something about the piano that really brings that melody to life and blends it all together.

**DIANA BROWN**

Woohoo! Finally found you guys again. I've been in Texas almost two years and just today found a copy. I'm elated. Got my favorite magazine in hand and loving it all over again. Thank you.

**SEALLIA LOVE**

### TWITTER

@littlebigtown Got my 2 copies of @countryweekly—one to read over and over and one to save. Such a nice article.  
**LORI EBER | @loriloricM**

Daily reminder . . . @chuckwicksmusic needs your votes for @countryweekly's #SexiestMan. Vote  
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Vote for @ScottyMcCreery for @countryweekly Sexiest Men of 2015 poll! He was #2 last year!  
**SHARON JILES | @sharonjiles**



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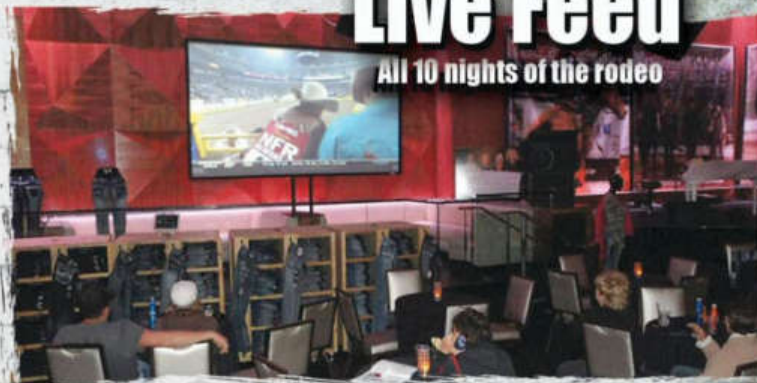
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## FIRST TAKE

### BUY ME A LAUGH

"Buy Me a Boat" singer Chris Janson (center) hams it up with his harmonica for three St. Jude kids as part of Country Cares at the Grand Ole Opry in September.









# THE COUNTRY BREW

A SWEET TASTE OF ALL THINGS COUNTRY

*Opening Act*

## THINK PINK

In a move that makes absolute and perfect sense, **KACEY MUSGRAVES** has been chosen to flip the switch on the seventh annual “Opry Goes Pink” show in conjunction with Women Rock for the Cure. The Oct. 27 show is the Opry’s annual pledge of support in the fight against breast cancer, and will include Terri Clark and Montgomery Gentry performing in front of the pink-tinted barn backdrop. The Opry will donate \$5 from every ticket sold to Women Rock for the Cure, so make plans to come out for a worthy cause. And, following Kacey’s eye-catching example, don’t skimp on the pink!

photo by Stephen Lovelace/GIAAD/BWR Public Relations





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## All Access



(Clockwise from above) **STAR-SPANGLED STAR** Trace Adkins sings the national anthem before the Titans vs. Colts football game in Nashville; **SPUD BUD** Kristian Bush and his pal Dater Tater hang out in the studio; **PILLOW TALK** Cassadee Pope comes in peace; **BABY BUMPIN'** It won't be long before Krystal Keith makes her dad, Toby, a grandfather for the third time.



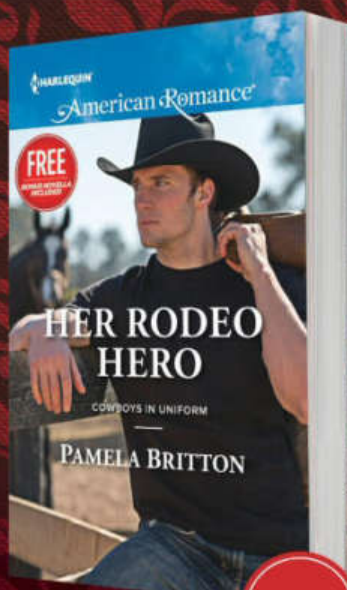
Trace courtesy Trace Adkins facebook; Kristian Bush Instagram; Krystal Keith Instagram; Cassadee Pope facebook; John, Willie & Stephen by Jeffrey R. Staab/CBS





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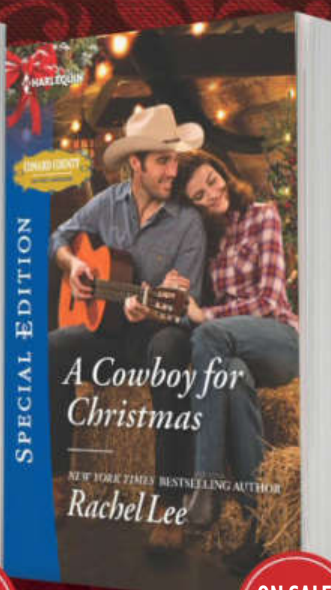
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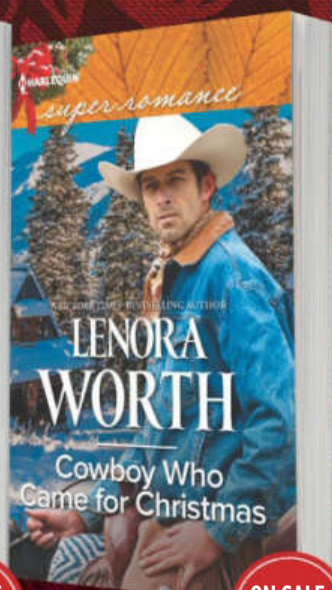
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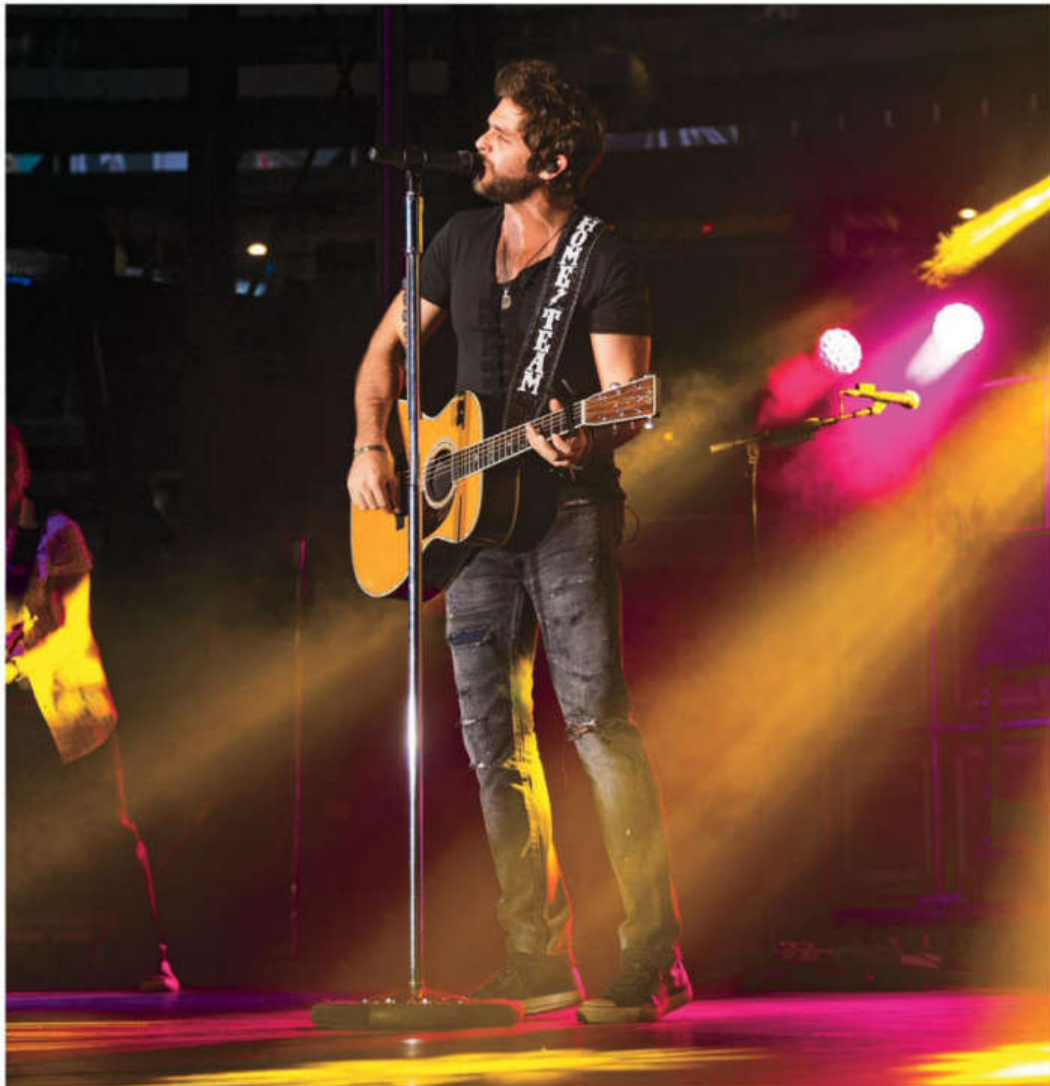
## Twister and Shout

**THOMAS RHETT** took his talents to AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, to host *Tangled Up in Texas*, an event that set the Guinness World Record for the largest game of Twister. *Nash Nights Live* host Shawn Parr (below right) emceed the event, which also included a performance by Thomas Rhett that coincided with the release of his new album, *Tangled Up*.



photos by Troy Fields







## UNDERWOOD OVERSEAS

**CARRIE UNDERWOOD** is not just a star stateside—she’s a genuine international phenomenon who can represent country music in places that don’t care about Tom Brady’s deflated footballs. In fact, she already headlined one night of the Apple Music Festival from London in 2015, and she should be set up for a big 2016 with her new album, *Storyteller*, hitting stores in late October. In March, Carrie will return to the British Isles to play all three nights of the Country to Country 2016 Festival, which she first played in 2013, the fest’s inaugural year. The gathering will now span three nights, with the addition of a March 11 date at Glasgow’s Clyde Auditorium, followed by shows on March 12 at London’s O2 Arena and March 13 at Dublin’s 3 Arena. Carrie is the first artist to be announced for the 2016 gathering, so stay tuned for more updates.



## Where Dreams Come True

Some stars just can’t seem to grow up, and that’s a good thing in the case of *We Love Disney*, a new compilation album featuring a who’s who of singing talent, including **GWEN STEFANI, ARIANA GRANDE, JASON DERULO, KACEY MUSGRAVES, RASCAL FLATTS** and more. The new album, which drops on Oct. 30, features 15 songs from various Disney movies. Kacey will tackle “Spoonful of Sugar” from *Mary Poppins*, while Rascal Flatts will team with Lucy Hale to sing the smash “Let It Go” from *Frozen*.



## BIRTHDAYS

**OCT. 19, 1945**  
**JEANNIE C. RILEY**

**OCT. 19, 1976**  
**CYNDI THOMSON**

**OCT. 20, 1970**  
**JIMI WESTBROOK**  
of Little Big Town

**OCT. 22, 1968**  
**SHELBY LYNNE**

**OCT. 23, 1956**  
**DWIGHT YOAKAM**

**OCT. 23, 1972**  
**JIMMY WAYNE**

**OCT. 25, 1958**  
**MARK MILLER**  
of Sawyer Brown

**OCT. 25, 1970**  
**CHELY WRIGHT**



## CROSSING OVER

Pop icon **CYNDI LAUPER** is planning her first foray into country music. The 62-year-old artist, famous for pop anthems like "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" and "Time After Time," recently announced plans to record a country album. Cyndi is hoping to do the project, tentatively scheduled for release in 2016, with legendary producer Tony Brown (George Strait, Reba McEntire).



Olympic gold medalist and seven-time NHL All-Star **THEO FLEURY** has traded in his ice skates for a microphone. Theo, who retired from hockey in 2009, dropped his first single, "My Life's Been a Country Song," in mid-September. His upcoming debut album, *I Am Who I Am*, will be released this week.



**LIAM PAYNE**, a member of the British-Irish pop boy band **ONE DIRECTION**, has gotten the word out to the media that he's no stranger to country music, having penned a number of country songs in the past. He



also stated that if the right song came along, he wouldn't hesitate to release it as a solo artist.



At his No. 1 party, Sam Hunt (center) is flanked by songwriters (from left) Shane McAnally, Josh Osborne, Zach Crowell and Jerry Flowers.

## DOUBLING DOWN

**SAM HUNT "TAKE YOUR TIME" AND "HOUSE PARTY" NO. 1 PARTY THE CRYING WOLF | NASHVILLE**

Sam Hunt knows how to throw a double No. 1 party: food trucks filled with hot chicken sliders from Riff's, Jeni's ice cream and a variety of crepes from Crepe A Diem, along with 100 of his closest friends at The Crying Wolf in Nashville.

"Take Your Time," which Sam co-wrote with Shane McAnally and Josh Osborne, and "House Party," which he co-wrote with Jerry Flowers and Zach Crowell, mark Sam's fourth and fifth No. 1 hits as a songwriter, respectively. Shane and Zach produced Sam's debut album, *Montevallo*, and for Jerry—who has spent 22 years touring with the likes of Keith Urban and was one of the original members of the trio The Ranch—"House Party" is his first No. 1 single as a songwriter.

While the success is sweet, and isn't lost on Sam, he now finds even deeper meaning in the music.

"Thank you, guys for investing your time and talent into this music," Sam said to his fellow songwriters. "I don't think I realized it when we were writing these songs, but now, after being on the road for a year, I have a new appreciation and understanding for how important these songs are. These songs are providing jobs for a lot of good people who are running around the country with us on the road now. They are giving fans the chance to come out, escape from reality and enjoy themselves. I get to watch these songs bring joy to people's lives every night, and it is just phenomenal. So thank you. I can't wait to get back in the [songwriting] room with you guys and do it all again."

ASHLEY EICHER



# METAMODERN COLORS

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, **STURGILL SIMPSON** has re-released his acclaimed album *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music* on pink vinyl. Sturgill, along with other stars like hip hop's Run the Jewels and rock's Primus, are taking part in Ten Bands One Cause, an initiative that raises money for Gilda's Club NYC, an organization providing community support for cancer patients. To order your record, visit [10bands1cause.com](http://10bands1cause.com).

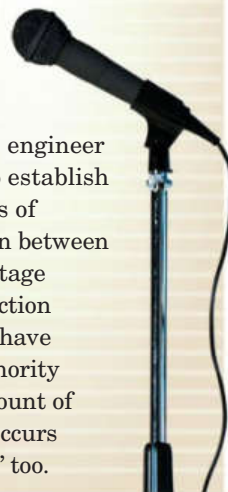


## WHAT'S THAT?

### "TALKBACK MIC"

noun

Keen eyes at concerts may have spotted a random microphone onstage that doesn't seem to be there for anyone to sing into. Often situated near the drum platform or behind the lead singer, the "talkback mic" routes directly to the front-of-house engineer or producer to establish a direct means of communication between the bodies onstage and the production team. And we have it on good authority that a fair amount of shenanigans occurs on "talkbacks," too.



## CROSS COUNTRY

WHAT IS YOUR  
FAVORITE POTATO  
CHIP FLAVOR?

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU  
ALWAYS WANTED AS A  
KID, BUT NEVER GOT?

WHAT IS THE ONE  
CHORE YOU HAVE  
NEVER DONE?

GARY  
LeVOX



Pringles'  
Salt & Vinegar.

A mom [laughs].

Mopped.

JAY  
DeMARCUS



Baked Doritos.

A swimming pool  
in the backyard.

I have never gotten  
one of those duster  
things and dusted off  
things.

JOE DON  
ROONEY



Cheddar Harvest  
Sun Chips.

Self-esteem [laughs]. No, what  
I really wanted that I never  
could afford was a moped. All  
the other kids had one but we  
couldn't get one.

Vacuumed.

KRISTIAN  
BUSH



Salt & Vinegar.

BB gun.

I'm a single dad. I've  
pretty much done all  
the chores at this point.



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- Jana Kramer



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Fairchild  
of Little  
Big Town**



**Big Kenny Alphin  
of Big & Rich**



**John Osborne  
of Brothers  
Osborne**



**Kelsea  
Ballerini**

**Tae Dye  
of Maddie  
& Tae**

# *On the FRINGE*

It's everywhere, from bags and boots to vests and sport coats. Fringe has never exactly been out of style in country music, but this fall it is being seen in abundance, inspired by the Bohemian trends of summer festivals.



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# ALOHA . . . HAWAIIAN CHICKEN

**COUNTRY NEWCOMER  
SARABETH** TURNS TO HER  
GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S  
CHICKEN RECIPE FOR  
HOME-COOKED GOODNESS.

**PHOTOS BY ASHLEY HYLBERT**

**RIISING COUNTRY STAR** SaraBeth savors coming off the road for one main tasty reason: the chance to whip up a good, home-cooked meal. The Dallas native—now based in Nashville—just released her current single, “Runnin’ Outta Lipstick,” and recently completed tours of the Northwest and the U.K., where she definitely got her fill of road cuisine.

“When you’ve been gone for so long and all you’ve eaten is catered food or restaurant food, you just want a home-cooked meal,” she says with a smile. And when she’s home, the young singer turns to a family favorite to get the job done—a Hawaiian chicken recipe handed down from her great-grandmother. “I used to visit her growing up,” SaraBeth recalls. “She’s actually the first person who got me interested in country music. She came up with this recipe and it’s kind of been handed down. Every summer when we grill chicken, it’s always this recipe that we use.”

SaraBeth invited *Nash Country Weekly* to her manager’s place for a little demonstration of the dish. “This can make several meals,” she says. “The best thing about it is that it’s so simple. And it’s delicious, too.”

**BOB PAXMAN**





## ME MAW'S HAWAIIAN CHICKEN

Serves 6

6-8 chicken breasts

½ cup soy sauce

½ cup brown sugar

3 drops Tabasco sauce

1 ½ tsp. ground ginger

½ tsp. paprika

1 clove garlic

1 cup pineapple juice

¼ cup melted butter  
or margarine

½ cup water

1 can pineapple slices



**MIX** ingredients (except pineapple slices) together and **MARINATE** chicken 3 hours, turning every 30 minutes.

**GRILL** chicken until done. Top chicken with pineapple slices. Serve with rice or chicken-flavored Rice-a-Roni.







## Singles

### Joe Nichols “Freaks Like Me”

RED BOW RECORDS

**B+**

Nestled amidst the abundant crop of releases from country music’s much-maligned wunderkinder is Joe Nichols’ most recent effort—a sturdy mid-tempo anthem that strays far from the buzzwords and

buzzy production prominent in so many of today’s hits. That makes it unusual, abnormal or, yes, even “freakish” in comparison to its contemporaries, but refreshing to those who hanker for something different. Of course, the “freak” that songwriters Monty Criswell, Josh Thompson and Lynn Hutton refer to here is the kind of person who, as the lyric states, is *just outside the in-crowd*,

*out of style and damn proud*. Joe’s honey-smooth vocals give the tune an almost sleepy feel that contradicts the thumping groove, creating a unique, unapologetic vibe that makes you want to listen again.

**LONG STORY SHORT:**

If “Freaks Like Me” is the new normal, we’ll take it.

**TAMMY RAGUSA**



## THE NCW JUKEBOX

Essential songs from the artists featured in this issue.

### GEORGE STRAIT

"Cold Beer Conversation"

### COLE SWINDELL

"Let Me See Ya Girl"

### THE OAK RIDGE BOYS

"Sweet Jesus"

### RAINEY QUALLEY

"Me and Johnny Cash"

### CRAIG MORGAN

"When I'm Gone"

### BRANTLEY GILBERT

"Stone Cold Sober"

### CHELSEA BAIN

"Power of a Woman"

### SARABETH

"Runnin' Outta Lipstick"

### ABBEY CONE

"Love Like Him Again"

### FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE

"Anything Goes"

### STURGILL SIMPSON

"Life of Sin"

### KACEY MUSGRAVES

"Biscuits"

LOOK FOR THIS  
NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY  
PLAYLIST ON

rdio

## Jo Dee Messina "Will You Love Me"

COUNTRY NOW

B

Just for the record, so to speak, Jo Dee's new single has been released through YouTube's dedicated country music channel Country Now.



You can find it on iTunes, too, should you wish to snag a copy of your own. Jo Dee takes an adventurous route, going fully

acoustic to deliver a powerful message on phony friendship and folks who stay in your corner only as long as the lights are burning brightly. Not that it's exactly "Positively 4th Street," but we can be grateful for some subject matter that actually contains a little depth. Jo Dee takes what must certainly be a difficult song to render, given its range requirements, and nails the emotion without going overboard. You likely won't catch this one on your favorite station, as the sparse production makes the tempo seem a bit draggy. At the same time, given the song's relatively new YouTube delivery model,

airplay might not be the goal here. Seek this out for yourself and give it a shot.

BOB PAXMAN

## Jon Pardi "Head Over Boots"

CAPITOL NASHVILLE

B+

The "traditional country" label is a slippery moniker that can often be found as



a descriptor for numerous eras of country music, depending on one's point of view. In the case of "traditional country" crooner Jon Pardi,

the decade is the 1990s. His new tune, "Head Over Boots," toes the line of '90s-era George and Alan but with a conscious effort to make it radio-friendly in 2015. Fortified with dance-hall appeal, a catchy hook, fiddle and steel, not to mention a pretty sicko electric guitar solo, "Head Over Boots" is primed to kick its way into the Top 30, something his previous two singles failed to do.

JIM CASEY

## Album



## Bart Crow The Parade

THIRTY TIGERS

B

Texas favorite Bart Crow continues his confessional style of songwriting on his sixth album, *The Parade*,

meditating on women, living in the moment and even the salvation-giving aspects of music. Mostly it alternates between jangly, roots-pop numbers like "Vapor Trails" and "Dear Music" that don't shy away from addictive hooks, and a few more forgettable, maudlin mid-tempo. To his credit, Bart sounds a little like a cross between Tom Petty and Son Volt's Jay Farrar, giving songs like "Life Comes at You Fast" a well-worn realism that should illustrate why he's become one of the Lone Star State's bright lights.

JON FREEMAN







# CMA ALL THE WAY

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*The 49th annual CMA Awards, once again hosted by Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood, will broadcast live from Nashville on Wednesday, Nov. 4, at 8 p.m. EST on ABC. So get ready to celebrate with country music's biggest stars. Without further ado, the nominees are:*



## ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR

**GARTH BROOKS**  
**LUKE BRYAN**  
**KENNY CHESNEY**  
**ERIC CHURCH**  
**MIRANDA LAMBERT**

## FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

**KELSEA BALLERINI**  
**MIRANDA LAMBERT**  
**KACEY MUSGRAVES**  
**CARRIE UNDERWOOD**  
**LEE ANN WOMACK**

## MALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

**DIERKS BENTLEY**  
**LUKE BRYAN**  
**ERIC CHURCH**  
**BLAKE SHELTON**  
**CHRIS STAPLETON**

## VOCAL GROUP OF THE YEAR

**LADY ANTEBELLUM**  
**LITTLE BIG TOWN**  
**RASCAL FLATTS**  
**THE BAND PERRY**  
**ZAC BROWN BAND**

## VOCAL DUO OF THE YEAR

**BROTHERS OSBORNE**  
**DAN + SHAY**  
**FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE**  
**MADDIE & TAE**  
**THOMPSON SQUARE**

## NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR

**KELSEA BALLERINI**  
**SAM HUNT**  
**MADDIE & TAE**  
**THOMAS RHETT**  
**CHRIS STAPLETON**

## ALBUM OF THE YEAR

**OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT**  
**JASON ALDEAN**  
produced by Michael Knox

**PAGEANT MATERIAL**  
**KACEY MUSGRAVES**  
produced by  
Kacey Musgraves,  
Luke Laird and  
Shane McAnally

**PAIN KILLER**  
**LITTLE BIG TOWN**  
produced by Jay Joyce

**THE BIG REVIVAL**  
**KENNY CHESNEY**  
produced by  
Buddy Cannon and  
Kenny Chesney

**TRAVELLER**  
**CHRIS STAPLETON**  
produced by  
Dave Cobb and  
Chris Stapleton

## SINGLE OF THE YEAR

**"AMERICAN KIDS"**  
**KENNY CHESNEY**  
produced by  
Buddy Cannon and  
Kenny Chesney

**"GIRL CRUSH"**  
**LITTLE BIG TOWN**  
produced by  
Jay Joyce

**"I DON'T DANCE"**  
**LEE BRICE**  
produced by  
Lee Brice

**"TAKE YOUR TIME"**  
**SAM HUNT**  
produced by  
Zach Crowell and  
Shane McAnally

**"TALLADEGA"**  
**ERIC CHURCH**  
produced by  
Jay Joyce and  
Arturo Buenahora Jr.

## SONG OF THE YEAR

**"AMERICAN KIDS"**  
**KENNY CHESNEY**  
written by  
Rodney Clawson,  
Luke Laird and  
Shane McAnally

**"GIRL CRUSH"**  
**LITTLE BIG TOWN**  
written by  
Liz Rose,  
Lori McKenna and  
Hillary Lindsey

**"LIKE A COWBOY"**  
**RANDY HOUSER**  
written by  
Randy Houser and  
Brice Long

**"LIKE A WRECKING  
BALL"**  
**ERIC CHURCH**  
written by  
Eric Church and  
Casey Beathard

**"TAKE YOUR TIME"**  
**SAM HUNT**  
written by Sam Hunt,  
Shane McAnally and  
Josh Osborne

## MUSIC VIDEO OF THE YEAR

**"BISCUITS"**  
**KACEY MUSGRAVES**  
directed by  
Marc Klasfeld



**"GIRL CRUSH"**  
**LITTLE BIG TOWN**  
directed by  
Karla Welch and  
Matthew Welch

**"GIRL IN A  
COUNTRY SONG"**  
**MADDIE & TAE**  
directed by  
TK McKamy

**"LITTLE RED WAGON"**  
**MIRANDA LAMBERT**  
directed by  
Trey Fanjoy

**"SOMETHING IN  
THE WATER"**  
**CARRIE UNDERWOOD**  
directed by  
Raj Kapoor

## MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR

**SAM BUSH**  
mandolin

**JERRY DOUGLAS**  
Dobro

**PAUL FRANKLIN**  
steel guitar

**DANN HUFF**  
guitar

**MAC McANALLY**  
guitar



# ABBEY CONE

Abbey has made her mark on the Texas music scene, performing in writer's rounds and acoustic shows with artists like Josh Abbott and Stoney LaRue, and at the Larry Joe Taylor Music Festival. Now, Nashville—where she just signed her first publishing deal—seems to be embracing her, too.

## Current Single

"Love Like Him Again"

## Hometown

Argyle, Texas

## Musical Soundtrack of Her Childhood

Patsy Cline, Willie Nelson, Bob Wills

## HEALING HARMONIES

"When I was about 12, I had a good friend pass away—I think it was seventh or eighth grade—and I didn't get to go to the funeral because I had to go to Nashville. So, I ended up writing 'I'll See You' about [my late friend] Alex. It was my first co-write, and we ended up recording it and I gave it to his parents. After we wrote that song, I realized that I didn't just write it. It *did* something for me. It helped me heal and get through that. I think when I realized it was more than just writing a song, that's when I really started writing."

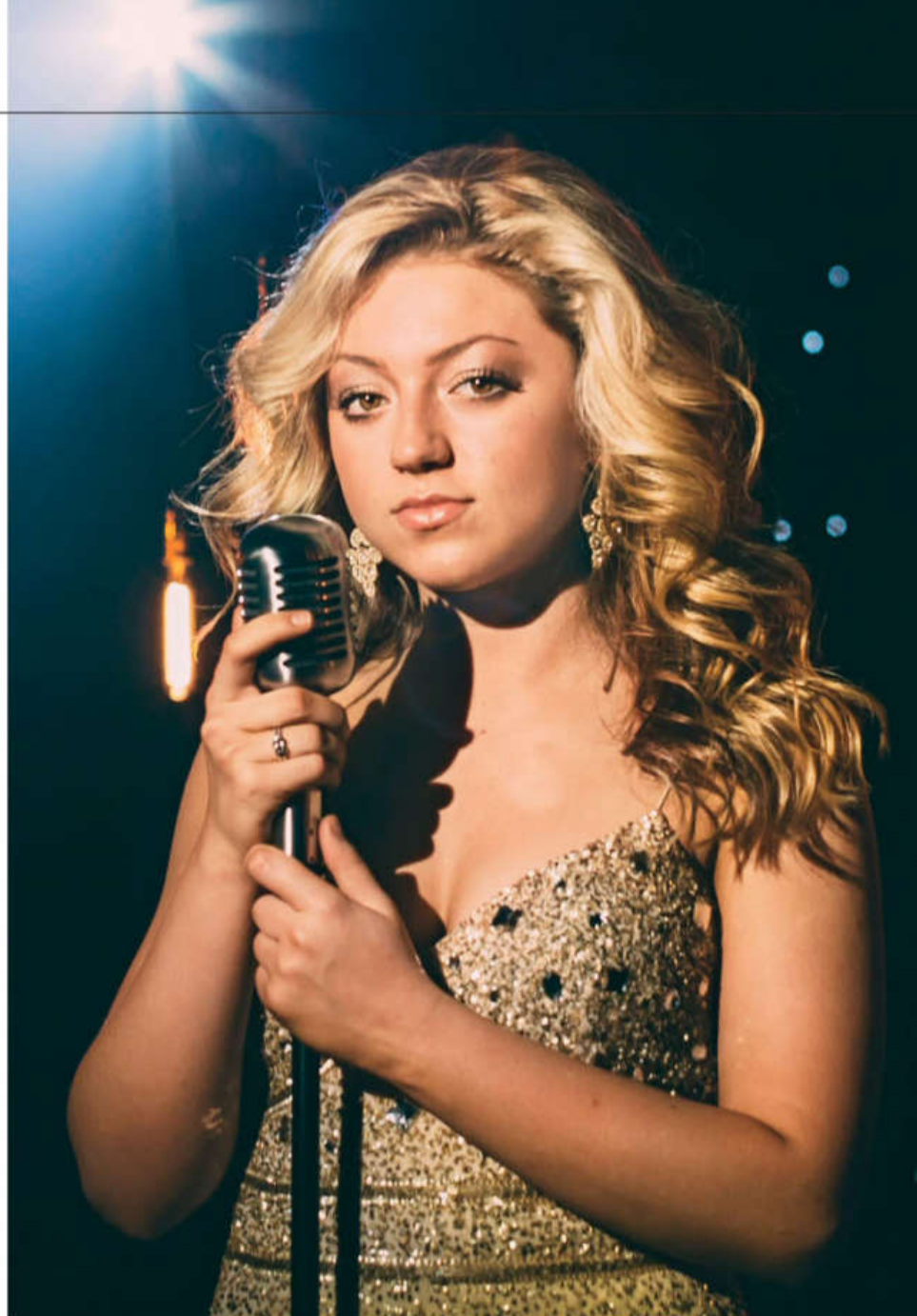


photo by Natalie Rhea/RPR Media

## RODEO DRIVE

"My whole family rodeos. All my siblings rodeo. So, from the time I was born, pretty much, I was always at rodeos. We had a bus and we would take our bus with our trailer to all these different rodeos across the country. By the time I was old enough to realize I was covered in dirt, I just didn't want a part of it. It isn't that I don't want to do rodeo; I'm scared to death of horses. That's

what I did at all the rodeos. I ended up singing the national anthem at them—especially the Stockyards. When I was 7, I sang the national anthem there and I made my mom hold my hand and walk out there."

## TENNESSEE WALTZING

"The best part of being in Tennessee, now that I don't feel like a visitor, is that if you're not from here you

think the big places are Broadway and Tootsie's and the Grand Ole Opry and stuff. It's been really, really cool to find the stuff the locals go to. But people here are so nice. Everyone has been so nice. When you realize that everyone here is trying to get to the same place, but you don't think of it as a competition, you feel like you're in your element. And it's so creative."

TAMMY RAGUSA



# NASH **NEXT**

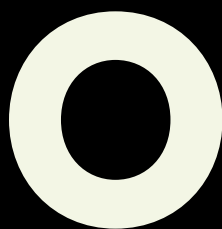
**ARTIST SPOTLIGHT**

## **MINING** **COLE**

**COLE SWINDELL**  
DIGS DEEP TO SPEAK  
HONESTLY ABOUT THE  
EFFECTS OF FAME.

BY TAMMY RAGUSA





n paper, he's one of the most successful new artists in country music. Cole Swindell's first three

singles—"Chillin' It," "Hope You Get Lonely Tonight" and "Ain't Worth the Whiskey"—from his self-titled debut album topped the charts. The fourth, "Let Me See Ya Girl," shows all the signs of doing the same. He also co-wrote all of those, as well as Florida Georgia Line's "This Is How We Roll," Thomas Rhett's "Get Me Some of That" and Craig Campbell's "Outta My Head," and toured with Luke Bryan and Jason Aldean. He even shared the stage with Kenny Chesney.

But in person or, in this case, over the phone, Cole is the same warm and unassuming Georgia boy we first saw a few years ago when he was the opener on Luke Bryan's Farm Tour in 2012. But even he admits that his meteoric rise to the top has left his head spinning a bit.

Asking Cole how he was adjusting to his newfound fame, he still sounds a little awestruck by it all. "I think you have big dreams of being in the company of Luke Bryan and Jason Aldean, but not right off the bat," he says humbly. "That's why I don't miss a chance to let everybody know how thankful I am and how lucky I feel, because I've been around the business long enough to know that it doesn't happen like this. You may go your whole career and not have three No. 1 songs, and here I am starting off my career with three."

He credits the years he spent in Nashville watching his friends and peers get record deals, make albums and go on tour as being pivotal in his music-biz education, adding that he's grateful his time in the spotlight didn't arrive sooner because he simply wasn't ready for it. But Cole also had a different idea of what being "ready for it" meant, and that involved knowing what to do with fame.

"When this is what you've always

wanted, and here you are—boom!—what are you going to do with it?" he says. "You've been given a platform and you better do some good with it. And that's what I'm trying to do, just let everybody be a part of this. It wouldn't be any fun doing it by yourself and I couldn't do it. To have so much support in Nashville, too, it really does mean a lot because there's so much talent and so many new artists that haven't had their chance yet, but they will. I'm just looking for my place to be able to maybe open

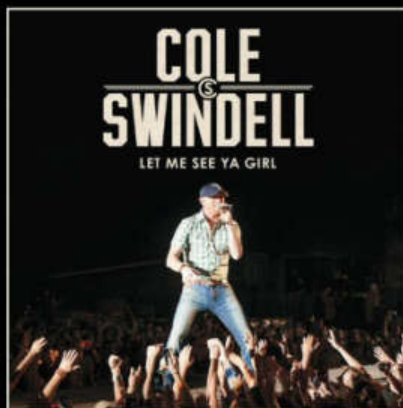
the door for somebody that maybe couldn't get it going. I know that's happened to me."

He is, of course, referring to Luke taking time to listen to him when he was just an aspiring songwriter selling merch for the superstar. Luke eventually took him on the road, and Cole is already returning that same kind of favor, putting his pal Adam Sanders in the opening slot on his own Down Home Tour starting in November. "He's right on the verge of getting that record deal," Cole says with as much excitement for his friend as he's shown for himself.

But with the freedom that fame has afforded him, there have also been pitfalls. Cole is keenly aware that not everyone who approaches him has the best intentions. We ask him how he deals with phonies and those who want to get close to him or use him for his connections, and his voice aches audibly as he says, "That is hard, too, because you don't really know. Before all this happened, I wanted to find somebody to settle down with, but you never know what people are after, so it changes everything. But I think I'm a pretty good judge of character."

He actually has always been cautious about whom he lets into his inner circle, but not for the reasons you might think. His explanation rings true in a manner similar to that of the Dierks Bentley song "My Last Name." "Right now it's not *my* drummer or *my* guitar player, it's Cole Swindell's drummer, it's all tied to my name," he says. "My granddad was so proud of our family name and he encouraged me, in a good way, not to do anything to harm that. That's just the way I want to do it."

Another obstacle that Cole quickly learned to overcome was losing his anonymity. But, with his ever-sunny outlook, he even finds an upside to that. "I remember years ago, saying that if I ever had the chance, I would sign everything, try to take pictures with everyone, and you get to see how hard that actually is to do the more successful you become. You really



**"I DON'T MISS  
A CHANCE TO  
LET EVERYONE  
KNOW HOW  
THANKFUL I  
AM AND HOW  
LUCKY I FEEL."**





Cole revs up the crowd at the 2015 ACM Party for a Cause in Las Vegas.

# CHILLIN' IT DOWN

## WHAT DOES COLE DO TO UNWIND?

"I'm a golf freak. If we can play, I'm playing. I'm not the best golfer by any means, I just love to play. It was something my dad always loved to do. Earlier this year, I got to play at Augusta National. I've done some pretty cool things and had amazing moments in my career in this short two years, but I know that's probably the coolest thing my dad would have thought I ever did was play that golf course."







**“YOU’VE BEEN GIVEN  
A PLATFORM AND  
YOU BETTER DO  
SOME GOOD WITH IT.  
AND THAT’S WHAT  
I’M TRYING TO DO.”**





(Above) At the American Country Countdown Awards with Luke Bryan; (above right) at the “Chillin’ It” No. 1 party with hit songwriter Shane Minor; (below from left) Cole with fellow Georgia boys Kip Moore, Jason Aldean and Luke Bryan; (right) chillin’ with pal Adam Sanders in Panama City Beach.



can't. I'm kind of a private person, but then again, I have to look at it from the other side. This is a lot better than them *not* wanting my picture," he says, laughing. "And you do have to deal with those people who aren't respectful, but I still think the fact that I get to do what could possibly make somebody's day, when you've been helped out so much . . ." He pauses, seeking words to express his apparent desire to pay his good fortune forward. One person whose day he is especially insistent upon making is his mother. While many young stars splurge on motorcycles, boats, pimped-out trucks and beach homes, Cole bought himself a modest place in Nashville and turned his attention toward his mom, who had just undergone back surgery. "She's taken care of me my whole life, so anything she needs, she's getting," he says firmly. "I want her to be able to come out and experience this. She's

retired, and she worked her whole life to take care of me. It broke her heart when I moved to Nashville and, honestly, I don't think anybody had seen me play or knew I loved it like I did, but getting the chance to take care of her and anything she needs, I'm there. My mom and my place, that's what I've been splurging on."

While his mom is obviously a special lady, the 32-year-old entertainer is open to inviting another special lady to share his new home. When reminded that he had previously mentioned finding someone to settle down with, he laughs, but also hints that he has met someone who is "super-awesome." He quickly adds, "It's tough, being so busy. I just want to make sure that I'm in the right place when I do that. Finding somebody that really cares about me, I've always prayed for that and now that I've maybe met one like that, I'm scared to settle down." He laughs and

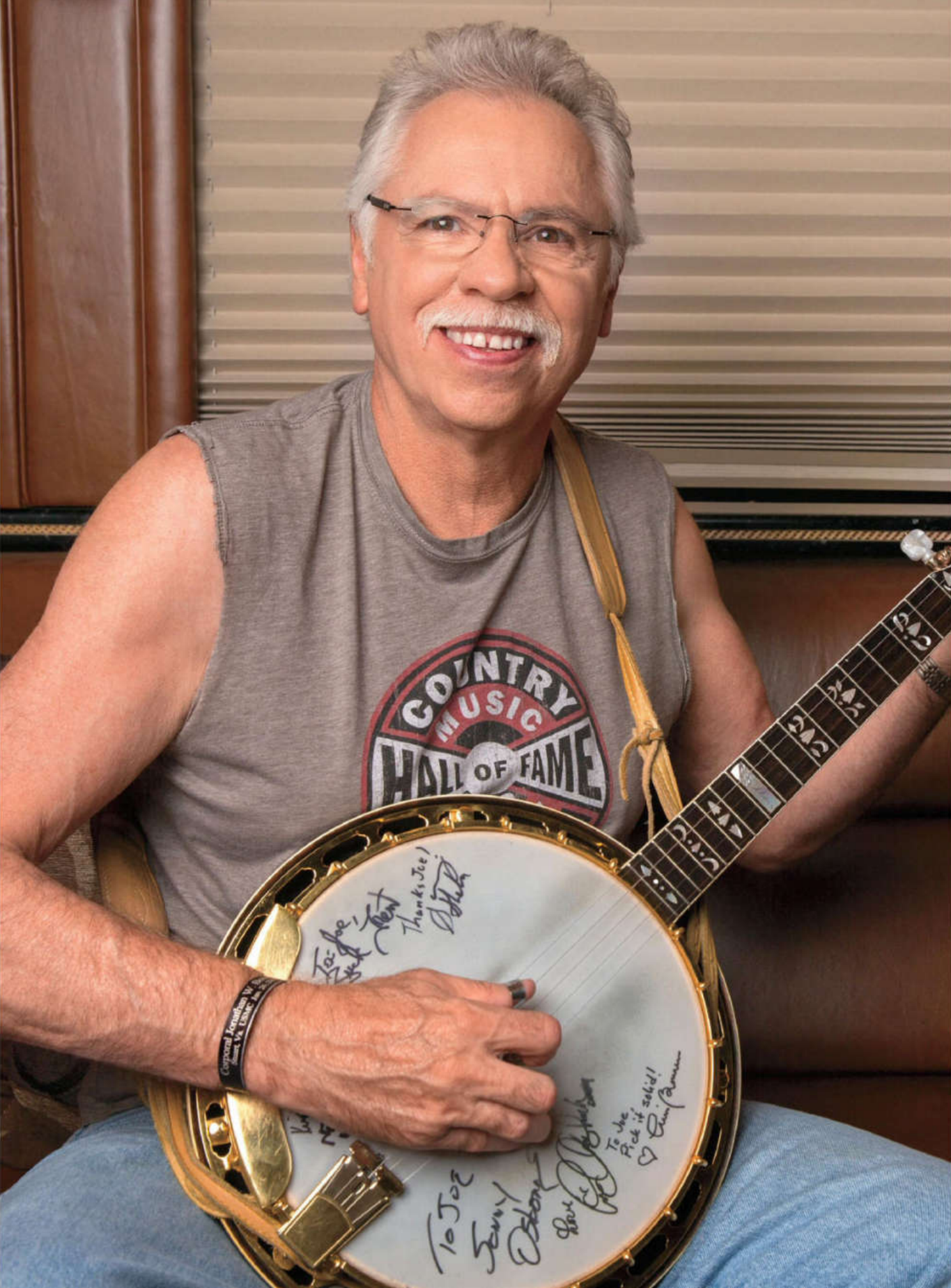
adds, "So I'm still single."

He's also incredibly grateful and humble to the point of disbelief. "It's so weird that I'm still the same guy, but I have fans of my music, and stories from fans of songs that got them through crazy times. It's hard for me to believe it's my music doing that. It makes me want to make better music."

This subject brings up that oh-so-important sophomore album. Although he is still in the early stages of writing and recording, Cole knows what he wants this album to accomplish. "This next album, I want it to make a statement. Whatever I come out with, I want it to say, 'This guy is here to stay.'"

He pauses again to collect his thoughts, finding the conclusion that had earlier eluded him. "And every day I know how fortunate I am. If you can take that and do something good with it, I don't know why you wouldn't." ■







# AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

IN THE FINAL PART OF OUR FOUR-PART SERIES ON  
**THE OAK RIDGE BOYS**, TENOR **JOE BONSTALL** FULFILLS HIS  
OFFSTAGE CALLING BY WRITING BOOKS AND WEBSITE ESSAYS.

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

**T**he Oak Ridge Boys—Duane Allen, Joe Bonsall, William Lee Golden and Richard Sterban—represent four distinct personalities who have managed to blend together as one unified quartet for more than 40 years. Perhaps one reason for their longevity is that all four enjoy their own personal hobby that keeps them occupied and fulfilled when they're not on the road or making music in the studio.

As the Oaks' Oct. 25 Country Music Hall of Fame induction draws nigh, *Nash Country Weekly* brings you the final segment in the four-part series profiling each member and his own unique hobby. Here, tenor singer Joe Bonsall recalls how his love of reading led to his current offstage pursuit of writing books and essays.

As a kid growing up in the urban confines of Philadelphia, young Joe Bonsall used a finely tempered imagination to create his own world, inhabited by a colorful cast of heroes and arch-villains. "I have always been an avid reader," says Joe, practically brimming with enthusiasm, which is his usual state. If there were no such term as "boundless energy," it would have to be invented for the 67-year-old singer, who's been with the Oaks for 42 years. "And I started writing books when I was a kid. At first, I wrote stories about make-



(Above) Teenager Joe holds the family pup, Lucky, in this vintage Christmas photo; (below from left) Duane Allen, Joe, Steve Sanders, who briefly joined the Oaks in 1987, and Richard Sterban.



believe baseball teams. I also had this superhero detective named Providence Joe, who was a Rhode Island Western gunfighter guy. I don't even know how I came up with that," Joe adds, letting go an extended laugh.

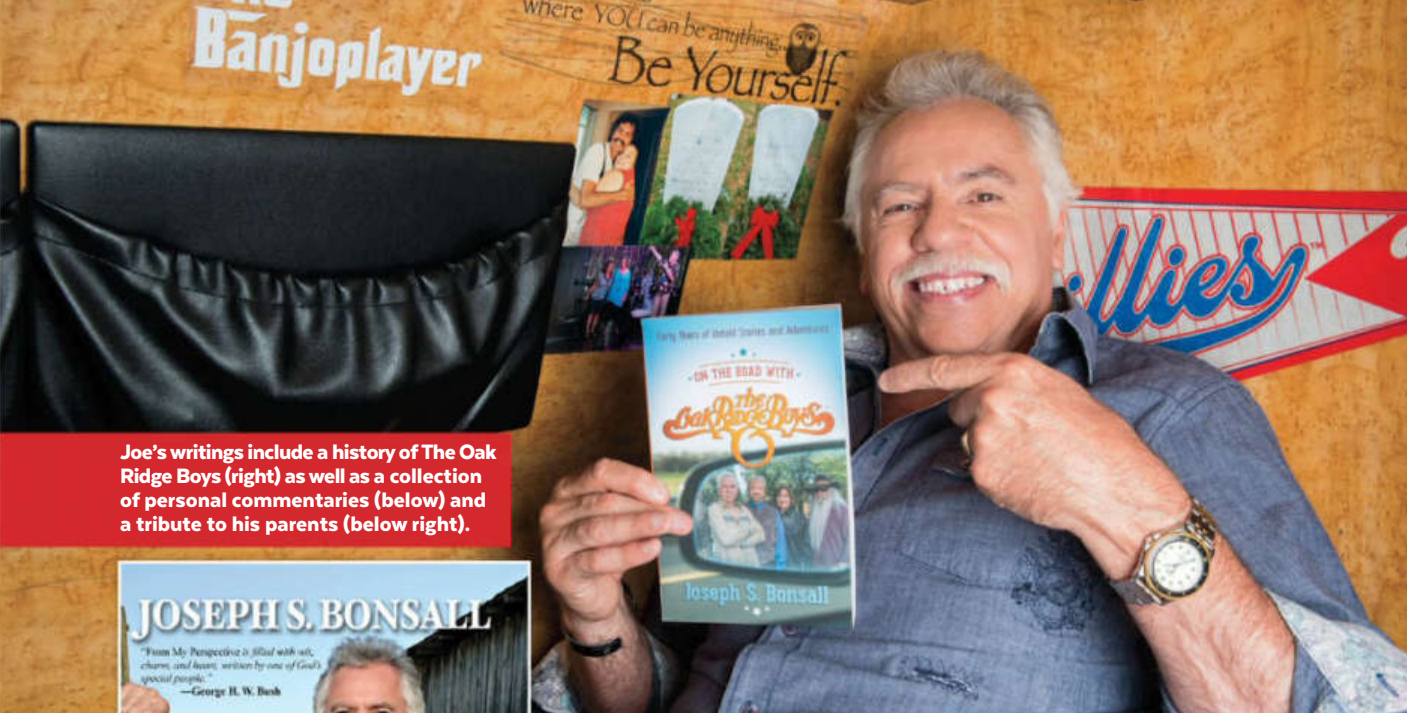
A budding Hemingway in the

works? Well, not exactly. Young Joe, influenced by the dazzling harmonies of the Philly doo-wop groups and, believe it or not, Southern gospel singers, turned to music as his away-from-school savior. "I was not very good in school, to be honest, because I was so focused on music," he recalls. "I was immersed in it. I never thought I would actually be a writer. In fact, if any of my teachers knew that I had a byline on anything, I'm sure they'd be twisting and turning in their graves."

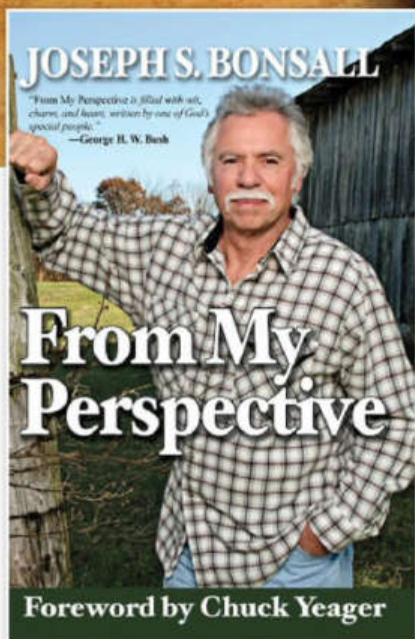
The cemeteries must be rocking around the clock today, because Joe has turned his youthful interest into a blooming second career. Under his formal name, Joseph S. Bonsall, Joe has authored 10 books, ranging from a children's series to personal reflections and a couple of historical chronicles of The Oak Ridge Boys, written 11 years apart.

His first bylines came coincidentally as The Oak Ridge boys started to achieve some mainstream success after debuting on the country charts in the 1970s. "As the group became more known," Joe says, "*Country Music* magazine would tap me once in a while to write an on-the-road piece/diary for them. Those were my first published pieces. Then, technology really started to hit and in the late '80s, I bought my first laptop. That's also when we bought our first





Joe's writings include a history of The Oak Ridge Boys (right) as well as a collection of personal commentaries (below) and a tribute to his parents (below right).

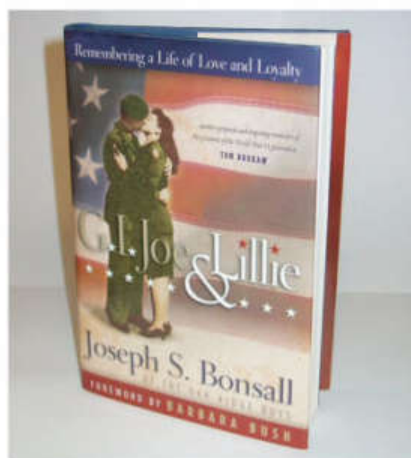


#### JOE BONSCALL CONTINUED

cat, Molly. I loved that cat," he adds with a toothy laugh.

Joe made that cat into a star. He ended up writing a series of four popular books, sadly now out of print, based on Molly the Cat. And as famous felines go, perhaps only Garfield can claim a more lucrative audience share. "They really were a big deal," Joe says. "Those books helped me connect with children again. We would go on the road and schools would contact us wanting me to talk to one of their classes. That first Molly book really started me on the road to writing."

His work of greatest impact is easily the loving tribute to his parents *G.I. Joe & Lillie: Remembering a Life of Love and Loyalty*. The book,



published in 2003, is based on a song that Joe wrote about his mom and dad, who both served in World War II. "That has probably been my most popular book," Joe says. "I did my research and I wanted to write it from a third-person standpoint. If you look at the book closely, you'll see that it's dedicated to all four of The Oak Ridge Boys' mothers. That's how important they are to us."

This past year, Joe released his latest in the catalog, *On the Road With The Oak Ridge Boys: 40 Years of Untold Stories and Adventures*. It's basically what the title implies, a road history of the group dating back to their early days as a gospel group but focusing mainly on the act we know today. It's his second book on the award-winning group, following

on the heels of *An American Journey: A Look Back Over 30 Years With The Oak Ridge Boys*, published in 2004. That earlier memoir fairly well captured the Oaks' history, warts and all.

"I chronicled a lot of things that people didn't expect to read in that book," Joe smiles. "It talked about William Lee Golden leaving the group for a while [1987–1996] and Steve Sanders, who replaced him. I thought it was a pretty good read. The new one is out now and it's doing really well."

You can check out more of Joe's musings and writings on his personal website, [josephbonsall.com](http://josephbonsall.com). The site contains short essays on a variety of subjects, the American Legion and the famed Rotunda at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum among them. Appropriately, Joe includes a piece on the Oaks' election to the Country Music Hall of Fame, which takes place Oct. 25. "It is the biggest thing to ever happen to The Oak Ridge Boys," he writes.

Joe seconds that as he chats with NCW at The Oak Ridge Boys' office just outside of Nashville. "It's just phenomenal to me that The Oak Ridge Boys are going to be in the Hall of Fame," he says, leaning forward for emphasis. "It feels like all the hard work and the years of traveling we put in have been rewarded. We could not be more blessed." **NCW**



Light & Sound!

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# CIRCULAR EMOTION

*Rainey Qualley makes her unforgettable debut on the Grand Ole Opry stage.*

STORY BY GAYLE THOMPSON



Rainey Qualley is hours away from fulfilling a dream that has been percolating for years: that is, making her debut on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. If the singer is anxious about it, she's not letting it show during a visit at her home on the day of her Opry appearance (which took place Friday, Aug. 28). Instead, she appears calm and focused on the task at hand.

"I'm really excited, and also really nervous," Rainey says. "Right now, there's so much going on that I don't really have time to be nervous, but," she admits, "I started having stress dreams this morning at 5 a.m."

By mid-afternoon, Rainey arrives at the Grand Ole Opry for soundcheck and one final rehearsal. Giving the performance of a lifetime in front of mostly empty seats,

with her mother, actress Andie MacDowell watching backstage, Rainey sings as if the whole world is watching. "Mom gets more nervous than I do," Rainey explains, although outwardly, at least, her mother is all smiles. "This is fun!"



Rainey and her mother, Andie MacDowell

Andie exclaims, rubbing her daughter's back. "This is a celebration!"

At a reception prior to Rainey's performance—attended by several industry executives, friends and Nashville notables such as Ty Herndon and TV personality Suzanne Alexander—record company executive Russ Zavitson takes a minute to honor the artist he signed to launch his newly formed label, Cingle Records. "I had a friend call me two years ago, and [say], 'I just heard the best singer I've ever heard in my life,'" Russ recounts. "I've heard that a lot in all the years I've been in this business. I think you're going to find out tonight that he was right. As we talk about how great a singer Rainey is, blessed with a beautiful instrument, even so, she's an incredible singer," says the record exec in praise of how skillfully

photos by Chris Hollo/Holo Photographics/Grand Ole Opry





(Clockwise from right) Rainey poses with Opry announcer Eddie Stubbs; Rainey and her mother meet the Opry's Pete Fisher; radio hosts Lorianne Crook and Charlie Chase greet Rainey backstage; a few CDs get Rainey's autograph; Rainey and band get ready for their big moment in the Opry circle.



Rainey uses her gift. "I've got to give credit to her parents," he adds, "because she's actually an even better human being. It's such a thrill to work with such a wonderful artist and a wonderful person."

"I couldn't be happier with the situation that I'm in," Rainey says of her association with the new label. "Russ, who is the label head and my manager and producer, had been wanting to start a label, or [was] toying with the idea for a while, but just hadn't met someone that he wanted to launch it with. I had been coming to Nashville to write for a while. Russ would set me up on appointments, and from the very first week there, we knew we had a special thing. So it just progressed really naturally. There's a little bit of pressure for me and for him, because starting a new label is a hard thing to do, but we're both

just really excited about everything that's going on. Everything is really starting to happen more quickly. I think more than anything, we're just eager."

After Grand Ole Opry member Steve Wariner introduces her to the stage, Rainey makes her official debut by belting out her songs "Me and Johnny Cash" and "Never Mine" to thunderous applause and an invitation to return from Opry vice president and general manager Pete Fisher. "There was so much adrenaline," Rainey says of the once-in-a-lifetime experience. "I remember moments of being onstage, but it's all an exciting blur. I was shaking. I think I wouldn't have been so nervous, but people kept asking, 'What does it mean to you? It's such an honor.' And of course, it is," Rainey affirms, "but when everyone is telling you it's such a

huge deal, it kind of gets in your head. So I definitely was very excited and nervous and overwhelmed, but once I got out there, everything else disappeared, and I was luckily able to just focus on singing, and try to get through it, really. One really nice thing is, Pete was very happy and very nice, and said I had an open invitation to sing whenever I want, so I told him that next time I'd be a lot less nervous."

Now, with the milestone performance behind her, Rainey can focus all her energies on finishing her new album as Cingle Records' flagship artist. Since the June release of her debut EP, *Turn Down the Lights*, Rainey has been putting the finishing touches on her first full-length record, which promises to be a somewhat eclectic affair. "With writing the rest of the album, we're trying to keep



*“I was very excited and nervous, but once I got out there everything else disappeared, and I was luckily able to just focus on singing, and try to get through it, really.”*



(Below, from left) Rainey makes a bunch of new friends at her Opry debut, including Steve Wariner, Ty Herndon and Mel Tillis.

photos by Chris Hall/Hallo Photography/Grand Ole Opry

#### RAINEY QUALLEY CONTINUED

a little bit of the variety.” Variety shouldn’t be difficult to achieve, as Rainey says there are “so many songs written at this point” and more in the works. “I’m still writing whenever I have time. Whenever I’m home, I’m doing writing sessions,” says Rainey, who also does some solo writing when she’s on the road, which is fairly often these days. Though she and her team are still narrowing down the song list for her debut album, she has a certain idea about the kind of mixture the final product is likely to contain. “Some of [the songs] definitely will have that traditional country song [feel], and some are going to be a little bit more pop/R&B, maybe. Some are a little more



folky and bluegrass.”

In between doing shows all across the country, Rainey is devoting most of her time to her new project but insists she isn’t in a hurry to release it. Satisfied to take a wait-and-see approach in spite of her obvious excitement and the momentum she’s been gaining with such



accomplishments as her Opry debut and stints opening for the likes of Willie Nelson and Loretta Lynn, Rainey explains her surprisingly laid-back philosophy for knowing when the album is complete. It will be done, she says, “just basically whenever we feel like we have enough kick-ass songs.” **NCW**



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# HERE COMES THE KING



TO THE DELIGHT OF HIS FANS,  
**GEORGE STRAIT** RETURNS TO  
THE CHARTS AND THE STAGE.

---

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

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**G**eorge Strait gave it to us straight a few years back. “I am not retiring,” he told *Nash Country Weekly* in 2012. He was putting a halt to extensive touring, as George would later reveal at a press conference at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville. But as far as the “R” word? Not going to happen.

“Part of my career is coming to an end—the touring part. I’m not going to tour anymore after these two final years,” George maintained, referring to his farewell series of shows, *The Cowboy Rides Away Tour*, which kicked off in 2013 and wrapped the following year. “I’m not saying that I’m never going to be onstage again. I’m just not going to tour.”

The clinching statement was to follow. “Some things will come up that I will want to do,” George declared. “There will be some special event that I may want to play.”







photo by Vanessa Gavalya/EB Media



## GEORGE STRAIT CONTINUED

And that time has come. At a late September press conference at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, George made the announcement that fans had been pining for ever since he completed his farewell tour. He would be playing two—now three—limited engagements at the brand-new Las Vegas Arena in 2016. George's shows are slated for April 22 and 23, Sept. 9 and 10 and now, because of overwhelming ticket demand, Dec. 2 and 3. More dates could be added as well.

George also dropped a nifty little bombshell when he announced that his new album, *Cold Beer Conversation*, would hit stores literally days later, on Sept. 25. There had been no advance word of the album release. And you must hand it to George and the team for keeping that a secret in this era of instant news and multiple delivery systems. *Cold Beer Conversation* represents the first release in the five-album record deal extension that George signed with his label in 2013.



So, we can now safely breathe the collective sigh of relief and declare, "The King is back!" But he's not back out of retirement—because he never announced a retirement in the first place.

George talked about his return to the stage, his new album, songwriting and other Strait-related topics with *Nash Country Weekly* at the MGM Grand on the day of his big media announcements.

George, sporting his trademark cowboy hat and jeans, fairly lights up at the mention of his Las Vegas stints. "It just kind of worked perfectly with what I said I wanted to do," George notes, flashing just a hint of a smile. "I wanted to have a few dates here and there, and when this came up, I said, 'This is what I was looking for.'"

Unlike his counterparts Shania Twain or Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, though, George would give a thumbs-down to a lengthy Las Vegas residency. That's just not, so to speak, in the cards. "I never wanted to do a residency here," George says. "Somebody asked me that a few

(From left) Lon Helton of *Country Aircheck*, George, AEG's Louis Messina and Rick Arpin of MGM Resorts International make the grand announcement.





years ago when we were announcing the last tour. A residency just would not work out for me.”

At this point in his career, George prefers more stay-at-home time at the Texas ranch he shares with wife Norma. During the interim between his final tour and the new album, George saw plenty of the homestead. He also found time to whittle a few strokes off his golf game. But, ever the consummate pro, George kept his hands in music. You just can’t keep an entertainer down for long.

“I finished the tour and put the live record [*The Cowboy Rides Away: Live From AT&T Stadium*] out,” George says. “So, we got all that finished. Shortly after that, I went in the studio and made this new record. So it has been sitting around all this time. I’ve been wanting to have it out.” And evidently, more than he ever let on. George’s tone grows more excited as he recalls the waiting period for *Cold Beer Conversation*, his first album since 2013’s *Love Is Everything*.

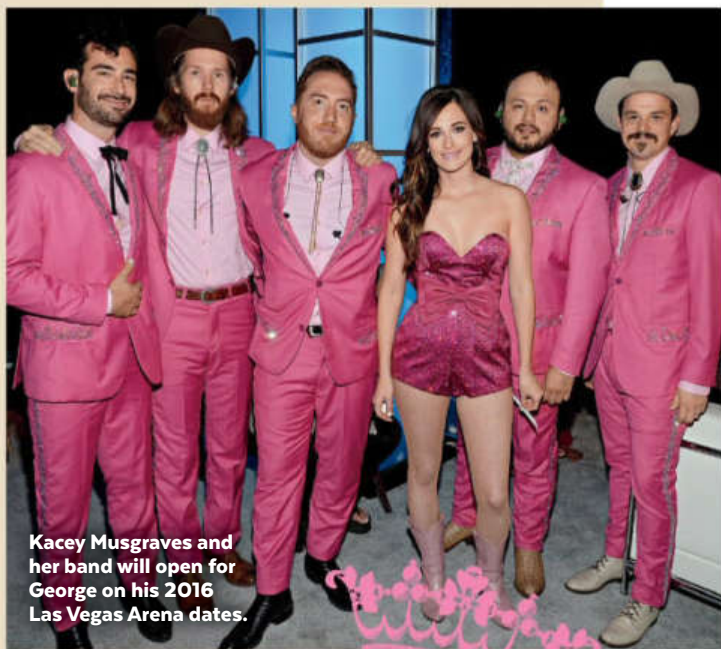
“I like to watch the charts and for 30 years I’ve been on there somewhere,” George says. “And not seeing anything of mine was tough. That was killing me. So, it’s nice to finally have this out there.”

For the album, George culled tunes from some of Music Row’s finest writers, including the prolific twosome of Brandy Clark and Shane McAnally (“Take Me to Texas”), Jamey Johnson (“Something Going Down”) and the venerable Bill Anderson, who teamed with Jamey and Buddy Cannon on the lighthearted “Cheaper Than a Shrink.” George also collaborated with his son Bubba and songwriter Dean Dillon, one of George’s favorite go-to guys. Along with Keith Gattis, the triple-threat writing partners worked on the album’s most warmly personal offering, “Everything I See,” a tribute to George’s dad, John, who died in June 2013 at age 91.

“That has the deepest meaning for me,” says George, casting his eyes downward in memory. He points to a couple of lines—*And I accidentally dial your number almost every day / Wish I’d have thought to slip a phone in the pocket of your shirt*—that most unflinchingly describe his loss.

“You get so used to talking with someone for so long and all of a sudden, they’re gone,” George explains. “And those lyrics are so true. You know, something good would happen and I’d be like, ‘I gotta call my dad.’ And then you realize, you can’t do that anymore. The idea started with the lines in the chorus about, *If somehow you could find that cloud with my stuff locked away*. We wrote from there.” Taking a moment to reflect, George answers a natural follow-up question before it can actually be asked. “It’s probably going to be a hard song for me to sing in my shows,” he says solemnly. “It was definitely difficult to write. I’m so pleased with the way it came out. Dean Dillon put a great melody to it.”

As George has recounted in the past, his songwriting passion was rekindled with the encouragement of his son. “He wanted to write with me,” George noted a couple of



Kacey Musgraves and her band will open for George on his 2016 Las Vegas Arena dates.

# OPENING MATERIAL

**KACEY MUSGRAVES gets every Texas gal’s thrill with the leadoff spot for George Strait in Vegas.**

“You grow up in Texas, and George Strait is the King,” raves Lone Star State lady Kacey Musgraves, a native of Golden. Next year, Kacey will be part of the King’s regal court, as she’ll be opening for George on all of his Las Vegas Arena show dates. The first performances take place on April 22 and 23 at the new venue.

When Kacey got the invite from George, her head did a virtual cartwheel. “Obviously, I was super-thrilled when he asked,” Kacey says. “And I’m still a huge fan. You really can’t go wrong with any of his hits.”

Kacey is nominated this year for three Country Music Association awards: Female Vocalist of the Year, Album of the Year for *Pageant Material* and Music Video of the Year for “Biscuits.” The acclaimed singer/songwriter likely speaks for legions of female fans in her further praise of George.

“What I have always liked about him is that he stays true to who he is,” Kacey says. “And I think he’s just so cute, you know?”



# THE ART OF THE COVER

**Nashville illustrator and designer WAYNE BREZINKA creates a unique and striking album cover fit for a king.**

You've seen the typical, time-honored George Strait album cover, which generally boils down to a headshot of George wearing a smile and his trademark cowboy hat. However, for his latest project, *Cold Beer Conversation*, George went in an entirely different, and certainly out-of-the-box, direction.

The cover art is an illustration of George surrounded by distinct lettering, images of rope and beer bottle caps and a couple of beer bottles in the lower right-hand corner. The finely-detailed concept is the work of Nashville-based illustrator and designer Wayne Brezinka.

Designing album covers is nothing new for the Minnesota native, who has created a number of artistic projects for several stars, including the minimalist cover art for Dwight Yoakam's album *3 Pears*. But the chance to design a cover

for country music's all-time King represented an alternating thrill and challenge.

"The creative director at George's label reached out to me and said that she had a project for me and it involves George Strait," Wayne begins. "And I about fell out of my chair. They indicated, per his request, that he wanted something different. He wanted some kind of rendering. I sent some rough pencil sketches and had about four or five different concepts. I thought of Texas and George and his surroundings. And it was approved very quickly."

The temptation for beer images to dominate certainly reared its head. "I did think a little bit in that direction," Wayne says. "There are some little caps and beer bottles. That was one of the last things I added. A cattle whip kind of surrounds the circle. The rough pencil sketches were what they approved. That was basically the circle with the type and those decorative elements around the circle."

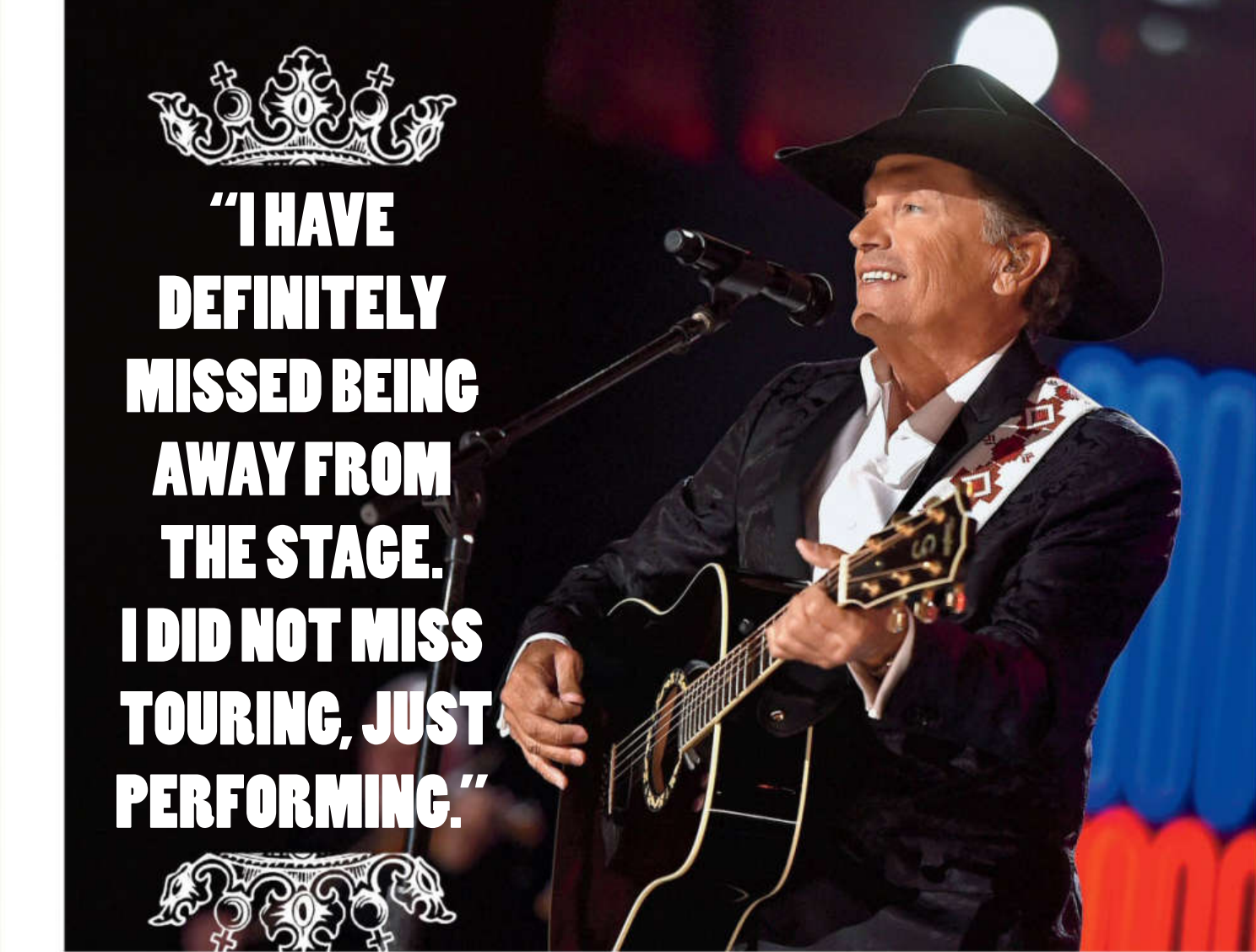
Wayne's cover ultimately got the most crucial seal of approval—from George himself. "I was really quite honored that the label gave me the green light," Wayne says in an upbeat tone. "But it's especially great that George loves it. I hope it'll turn some heads in the country realm."



**CHECK OUT MORE OF  
WAYNE BREZINKA'S WORK:**  
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**"I HAVE  
DEFINITELY  
MISSED BEING  
AWAY FROM  
THE STAGE.  
I DID NOT MISS  
TOURING, JUST  
PERFORMING."**

**GEORGE STRAIT CONTINUED**

years ago. "My son got me back into it and I realized how much I missed it." Cut to the present day, and the fire continues to smolder. In addition to "Everything I See," George co-wrote "Let It Go," released as a single, and "It Takes All Kinds" for *Cold Beer Conversation*. George tells *Nash Country Weekly* that he's become more open to sharing his thoughts in song. There are subjects that he wants to speak about as he enters this new chapter in his career.

"I have things that I want to reflect on," he says. "But you never know where an idea is going to come from. I mean, you can wake up in the middle of the night and have an idea or melody in your head." At that, George, 63, laughs and takes a self-deprecating shot at his occasional lapses in memory. "The

thing is now, when an idea comes to you, you better get up and write it down," he smiles. "If I don't do that, I won't remember it. Of course, now it's easy to do that. When you have an idea or come across something, you can just pull out your phone and jot it down in your Notes. A lot of songs that I've written lately have started out that way."

Not that George has totally acquiesced to songwriting technology, though. He'll admit that he hasn't quite accepted the notion of the computer as a songwriting tool. "My son does that, puts his songs and melodies into the computer," George says. "When you write with him or Dean Dillon, that's how it's done. They don't have a pad and paper, which is what I like. They also Skype a lot and write that way. So, songwriting has changed in that respect. I just

can't bring myself to do it like that."

Fans can certainly revel in the notion that new songs exist, whether they've been penned in parchment or on a Smartphone app. And next year, you'll get your first glimpse of George on the concert stage since June 2014. No one's happier about George being back than the man himself.

"I have definitely missed being away from the stage," George says. "I did not miss touring, just performing." Outside of a private event that might come George's way, the only venue where you'll catch George in the near future is the new Las Vegas Arena, slated to be completed by early 2016. "I'm exclusive to them next year," George says. "So there won't be any other place you'll be able to see me except here."

Just one more reason to shout the old saying: viva Las Vegas! **NCW**



# EUROPEAN VACATION

AN  
INTERNATIONAL  
TOUR STOP  
BECOMES A  
TREASURED  
MEMORY FOR  
**CRAIG MORGAN**  
AND WIFE KAREN.

While a lot of people dream of taking overseas vacations, it isn't all that unusual for country artists to have international stops as part of their world tours. Craig Morgan had certainly been to Europe on previous occasions, as had his wife, Karen Greer. But this summer was different for both of them, as Karen decided to tag along with her husband and his band as they performed at military installations and some personal dream destinations in France, Scotland, Germany and Norway. Karen thoughtfully documented the entire experience in her journal. The journey, and Karen's journal, began on July 22. Craig's latest single, the passionate "When I'm Gone," arrived in early September.

TAMMY RAGUSA

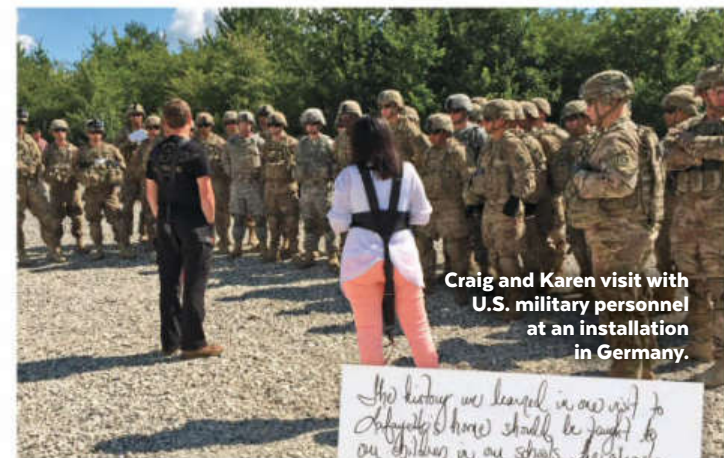
**NCW: Why did you decide that this was the time to take a trip with Craig and the band?**

**KAREN:** It was Europe. There are a lot of things here in the United States that I would love to see and I want to take the kids [to see], but Craig, being gone so much, we never really had the opportunity to do those things—you know, the Grand Canyon and D.C. and the West Coast. So, it is our plan that we will take our grown children and grandchildren on those trips around this country, [to] Philadelphia and Boston and New York City and Washington, D.C. But

this was Europe, and those tours . . . you just don't know if they'll come along again. Or, if they do, will they go back to France? And France is the one country I've always wanted to go visit, so that was it.

**CRAIG:** It wasn't about her being with me on this trip. The only reason she tolerated all the stuff that she did at the beginning was so that she could go to Scotland again. I bribed her.

**NCW: This was a working vacation for Craig and the band, though. You visited and they performed at some military bases.**



Craig and Karen visit with U.S. military personnel at an installation in Germany.

**KAREN:** Yes. And, bless his heart, he was a trouper. He knew I wanted to go and explore, and he did as well. He has been through a lot of those countries and stayed a little longer in others, but didn't get to see it like a tourist. He had just as much fun as I did, although it was just a little tiring when he had to

*The history we learned in our visit to Augsburg (here) should be taught to our children in our schools. The stories of a few Europeans to purchase the world's money, just to preserve the friendship, the relationship, between England and the United States was amazing to hear. The special relationship between Washington and Augsburg provides the relationship our countries have in the future especially during visit. I am always ready to be friends and acquire to the people. I am absolutely nothing I had here. Just acquiring people, not unlike ourselves. May love and we travel to these countries as well as. I would love to come back some day and visit more of this beautiful country, with a little more of the history in my head and heart. We have our question and most importantly, we love you in our heart.*





(Above) Craig, Karen and the band in France; (below) Craig and Karen do a little sightseeing in Amsterdam.



...and yes Wendy, I had a croissant,  
Krisch - soon - no T. Helical

Tuesday July 2nd

We were on the double-decker bus  
for 12 hours! all day! We left Capanno,  
France @ 10am. Craig had to leave early to climb up to  
Saint Michel d'Aiguilh (Orpailly Saint Michel)  
It was inspiring. It was beautiful to see  
my former high school near stand in this  
Chapel that had always been there -  
there as go date it was built - time -  
immortal is how it is dated - in front  
of the altar bearing a wooden statue of  
Saint Michael from the late 14th century  
and our. Yes. Our. You see  
Michael is the Patron Saint of the  
Dining Chapel before built. I can only  
imagine what he was thinking, what he  
and wanted now but without moment.  
I do not ask.



My bag. Of course. This was not my  
idea of a shopping spree in France!  
I'm weeks worth of clothes, four pairs  
and an absolutely wonderful carling won  
have disappeared into this bag. Totally.  
But I am with the band right? They  
are in the same boat, so I should stay  
some place.

-And of course Starbucks gets my coffee  
every and it tastes like burnt coffee out.  
-And of course we don't have time to have  
them make us another.

July 27 @ Lam our bag, were delivered  
up this. Stiles not on the floor -  
faded in the la by or color - France  
It truly is the Little Things!

July 28 I walked around the city of  
Capanno with my little camera. I  
We walked up the hill to the Saint Michel  
de Capanno then to la Cathédrale. On the way  
we visited Chapelle de Chauvigne - Laforgue.

go singing. They did 90-minute  
shows, so it wasn't just that  
he had to sing, it was back-  
to-back 90-minute shows  
and a couple of those were  
three nights in a row, so it was  
tough. But we definitely know  
where we want to go back, if  
we ever do get to go back.

**CRAIG:** When I visit these  
military bases, it's easy for  
me to slip right back into that  
mode and feel like you're a  
part of it again. But the longer  
I'm away from it, the more  
I'm reminded what won-  
derful people they are. You  
go over and visit with them  
and you get this sense of  
pride that is overwhelmingly  
emotional. And not in just  
our nation, but in those men  
and women that are serving.  
There's an attachment you  
feel that is almost indescrib-  
able, and having served, I feel

like that attachment is even  
more, even thicker. I really  
believe that the people in the  
military, even those that were  
born after I got out, that are  
serving now, they take more  
pride in what I'm doing than I  
do. They're proud that one of  
their own is doing something  
like this. So that's why I try to  
wear their banner and try to  
represent them honorably, as  
honorably as I can and still  
be me.

**NCW:** Karen, this was your  
first time to tour with the  
band, and in your journal,  
you mention how much  
you learned about them.

### How was it for you, being one of the guys?

**KAREN:** I just love them. I  
don't even think they know  
how much I love those guys.  
You know, everybody thinks  
about the artist and I don't  
think they think about the  
other guys. They're out  
there, too, every day. The  
artist might be gone a few  
more days just because  
there's radio stuff that the  
band doesn't go to and  
there are just other things  
that go on, but they're still  
gone a lot. And they don't  
usually get recognized for  
their hard work. And they're  
just a great bunch of guys.

And Craig's brother is out  
there, too, so Joey and I got  
to have those little brother/  
sister looks about Craig—  
"Oh, gosh, here he goes." So,  
that was neat to spend that  
time with Joey as well.

**NCW:** You mention that the  
airline lost your journal en  
route to France and that the  
band had to play in bor-  
rowed clothes without all  
their gear. Does that mean  
you got to shop in France?

**KAREN:** I was very excited.  
I thought, "Yes! I get to go  
shopping in France!" But  
the shops were closed on  
Sunday and Monday.

**NCW:** You didn't make it to  
Paris, but did you find a fa-  
vorite spot in France?

**KAREN:** Mont Saint-Michel.  
It's at the top of a rock. It was





Craig and Karen admire the architecture in France.

#### CRAIG MORGAN CONTINUED

started in 900, I believe. We finally get up to the top, it was me and Craig and Brian Tapley, his sound guy. And there's a statue of St. Michael, a wooden carved statue from, if I remember right, the 1100s, 1200s. And Craig walked over in this little alcove and he said, "I just felt something wash over me." We're not Catholic and he got real emotional. St. Michael is the patron saint of soldiers—especially paratroopers—and Craig was a paratrooper. I will never forget it. I stood there and saw his shoulders shudder and I just stopped, because I was walking toward him. He could feel it and I could see him feel it. It was amazing. I bought a rosary on-site at the old cathedral and the medallion in the middle is St. Michael.

**CRAIG:** There's one installation in Germany that we visited. The one that we played in the hangar, that was really cool for us because when I got in there and we started talking to some of the soldiers, we found out they hadn't had any entertainment in that installation in quite some time because it was kind of out of the way, so it was really special to hear these people, because they're so grateful.

#### NCW: How was the language barrier?

**KAREN:** We sat down at a restaurant for dinner one night. And we get the menu out and we're just looking at it, and I'm going, "OK, there's a picture of a fish here, so these dishes must be fish." And we're just laughing. The waiter knows no English and we know no French. So

We pull up to the house at 1 pm. Mike, the realtor appears a few minutes later. It is overwhelming, the feeling of suspense. We walk around to the front door and enter into the pink limestone family crest, over the door. The Seigneur's Suite by this. Exactly had us feel with Craig all kind of our little stuff. It is huge, beautiful. Oh. Color. Full. Stone. It feels like home. I hope this dream of ours to put a place back in the family connection. 10 acres of gardens and grass and woods and pathways like something out of a magazine. And a little old garden we can barely understand, but accept so thick. I stand there engraved with Craig and me in initials from the 1700s. It is perfect. I'm speechless.

July 23, 2015 We arrive in Amsterdam and the guy checking passports looks at Craig and says, "Do you still think America is the greatest country in the world?"

It's all day today. Oh it is 10 pm and it looks like it's about 6 pm. This is a beautiful place, Norway. We sit into the hotel, had dinner, and just conversation about previous comment of airport. I am leaving a very lot about these guys my husband spends so much time with, and I see why they love each other so much. She really is a great place to be. It is not all rain and every one falling at your feet. I see one man, they look like they have spurs, they argue, they fall... Stronger.

we couldn't eat, we couldn't order dinner. We were just dying laughing and the waiter is looking at us like we have three heads, then he starts laughing. Finally we say, "Wine, red." And he said, "Oui, oui!" and he was off. So, we sat there and drank a bottle of wine. And it's not like in America where they give you the free bread, it was just wine.

#### NCW: You visited Scotland and found a home that belonged to your ancestors. Any chance of getting it back into the family?

**CRAIG:** We actually went to see the realtor and we went real early because I wanted to go ahead and drive there, so when it came time to meet the realtor, I would know where I was going and not get lost. When we pulled up to the yard, lo and behold, a deer runs across the yard. My wife looked over at me and said, "I'm pretty sure that's a sign."

**KAREN:** That's what happened [in

Tennessee]. When we pulled up in 2002 or 2003 to buy this property, deer ran across the yard. Yes, so the exact same thing happened. And then, we get out and the realtor gets there and we go around to the front door and over the door, carved in the old limestone from the 1400s, was the family crest. So, I'm like, "We've got to do this!"

**CRAIG:** We'll see . . . if it makes sense for us to be able to go there. We're looking at retirement down the road; the day will come some day, and it might make sense to have a place like that where we can go spend a few months, then come back home and work a little bit, then go back.

#### NCW: Any plans to return?

**KAREN:** We've talked about that. The airline did crush my nativity scene that I bought at the chapel in France, so maybe we will go back. There's just so many places to go. **NCW**



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– Janet F.

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Colt Ford (left) joins Brantley onstage for "Dirt Road Anthem."



# RIVER STRONG

**BRANTLEY GILBERT and friends celebrate the lives of fallen servicemen at Chattanooga Unite.**

PHOTOS  
BY CARISSA  
RICCARDI

The nation was rocked to its core when five servicemen lost their lives in two separate drive-by shootings at military recruiting centers in Chattanooga, Tenn., on July 16. In the days that followed—while the country tried to return to a sense of normalcy—Brantley Gilbert was thinking of a way to help comfort the community, the families and even his own hurt. He called a local radio station and offered to give an intimate concert for the families, but realized that wasn't enough.

"I got to thinking about it and, really, the families and the community deserved a more grand gesture," he tells us on a call the day

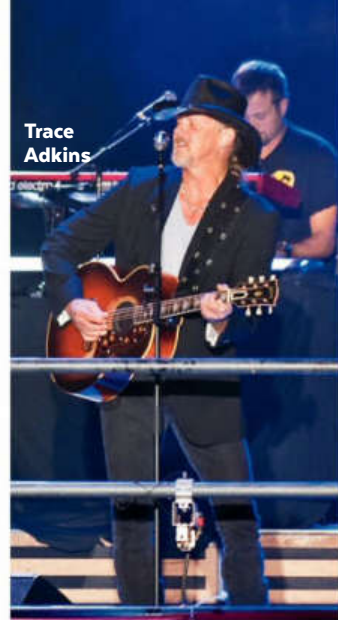
after headlining the Chattanooga Unite: A Tribute on the River benefit. "We realized that the community was bleeding, too, it wasn't just the families. It was really all of us. And the minute we said we were going to blow it out and do something big, it was amazing. The city of Chattanooga came to the table with all kinds of ideas, and the radio station had ideas and it just turned into something bigger than we were even planning. It was absolutely amazing."

The original intimate, acoustic set morphed into a daylong event featuring a full-blown parade, a Blue Angels flyover and a concert hosted by Samuel L. Jackson

on Chattanooga's picturesque Riverbend Stage with performances from Brantley, Harry Connick Jr., Aaron Lewis, Trace Adkins, Jamey Johnson and Colt Ford. Brantley admits he was overwhelmed by the support from his peers and the 80,000-plus people in attendance, but it was time spent backstage with the families of the military personnel that touched him most.

"I talked to several of the widows and they all had a story about how my music was either a part of their relationship or what song meant something to them," he remembers. "One of them said that 'My Kinda Crazy,' a song I wrote for [my wife] Amber, was





(Left) A parade before the concert honors the fallen heroes; (below) Brantley meets with the families of the deceased servicemen and helps present a donation to the National Compassion Fund.



## IN MEMORIAM

Nash Country Weekly honors the fallen soldiers from the July 16 shooting in Chattanooga and extends condolences to all affected families.

**Lance Cpl.  
Squire  
"Skip" Wells**

**Gunnery Sgt.  
Thomas J.  
Sullivan**

**U.S. Navy  
Petty Officer  
Second Class  
Randall Smith**

**Sgt.  
Carson  
Holmquist**

**Staff Sgt.  
David Wyatt**



their song. They danced to it at their wedding. She talked to Amber for 30 minutes. I was so proud of Amber. The whole day was overwhelming, emotionally, but there were so many good things that came out of it. It blew my mind."

Brantley admits he held nothing back during his performance and was concerned that those in attendance may have misunderstood his

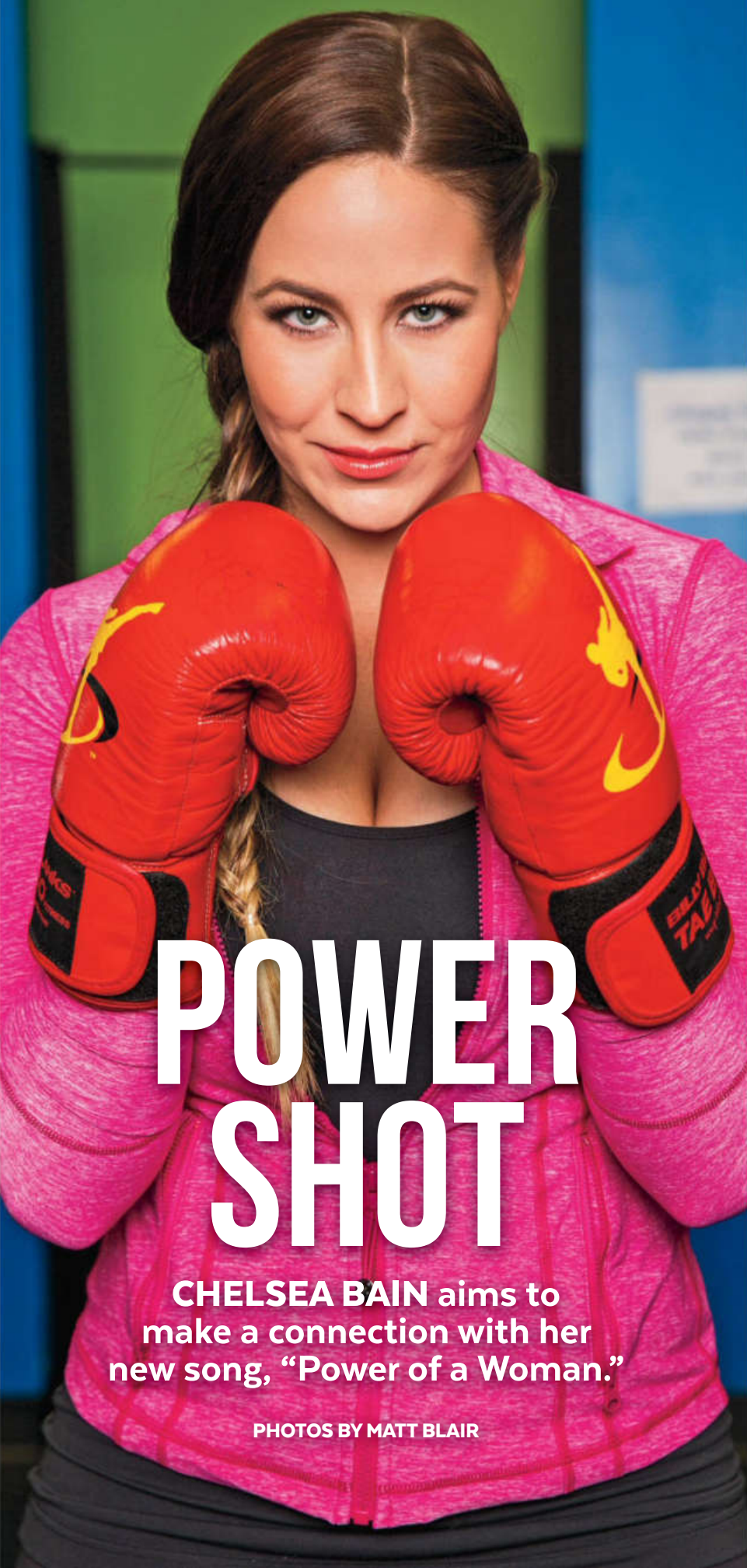
high-energy show. He says, "When I took the stage, I played a couple of songs and then I stopped and I told them, 'Look, I know there are a lot of you that are probably wondering why we're playing rocking songs at an event like this. To be honest with you, I know part of the grieving process is to grieve and mourn, but there's also part of the process to celebrate the lives and celebrate

the legacies of these gentlemen, and that's what we're doing. We can't bring the families' sons and brothers and husbands back, but maybe we can give them a smile."

Chattanooga Unite: A Tribute on the River was a free concert; however, donations from the event exceeded \$200,000, with proceeds going to The National Compassion Fund.

TAMMY RAGUSA





# POWER SHOT

**CHELSEA BAIN** aims to make a connection with her new song, "Power of a Woman."

PHOTOS BY MATT BLAIR

## COUNTRY ROCKER CHELSEA BAIN

feels right at home when she's on-stage pumping up a crowd before a NASCAR event or opening for Big & Rich. But she's also not afraid to step out of her comfort zone to try something new, which is why she recently released "Power of a Woman," an empowering ballad unlike anything from her past catalogue of work. It's also why she's at Team Tae Bo Fitness in Franklin, Tenn.,

### TALE OF THE TAPE

**CHELSEA  
BAIN**

**AGE**  
26

**HOMETOWN**  
Phoenix

**SINGLE**  
"Power of  
a Woman"

on an early Monday morning with fitness guru Billy Blanks, creator of the Tae Bo exercise system.

Female empowerment isn't a new subject, but it sure has been in the headlines lately. From the Saladgate debacle to Maddie & Tae flipping the script on bro country with their anthem to resilience, "Girl in a Country Song," women are roaring. Perhaps no one is roaring louder than mixed martial artist and actress Ronda Rousey, who has been driving home the point that it's perfectly acceptable to be a beautiful, speak-your-mind, ass-kicking woman.

"I get it, women are supposed to be feminine," says Chelsea as she tries on her first pair of boxing gloves, "but sometimes being feminine and having fun don't go hand in hand. I mean, how badass is Ronda Rousey? She's like my new hero."

With that statement, Chelsea smacks her gloves together and does her best Rocky Balboa impression, shuffling from side to side with her arms extended over her head. She's not ready for Apollo Creed just yet, but she is excited about getting her first Tae Bo lesson from the aforementioned Billy Blanks, who is in town to lead two seminars at his affiliated gym. As more than 100 Tae Bo enthusiasts, mostly 30-something women, pack the class, there's a concentrated air of empowerment in the room, which is a nice parallel to Chelsea's new tune.





## BLANKS' SLATE

**"I go all over the country and world giving seminars, and it's just so important to be mindful when you work out," says Tae Bo creator Billy Blanks. "A lot of people go through the motions without thinking. It's not all about the body. You need to be cognizant—with your mind—of the motions your body is doing. It's really about connecting."**



"Power of a Woman' is like everything I want to portray," says Chelsea, who is now getting a few one-on-one pointers from Billy before the class begins. "The video [in which Chelsea stars] is the story of a military wife who finds her husband's deployment letter and realizes he has to go. In these situations, the wives and girlfriends are left at home, and I wanted to portray being strong—both for him and me. It's just as hard for him to leave his family as it is for me. It seemed like a great way to represent the song."

As the roomful of pugilistic hopefuls continue to limber up for the ensuing class, Chelsea takes her place among the masses. She's a little nervous about the unknown, but she's also pumped about the challenge that lies ahead: a two-hour cardio burnout.

"I'm really excited because I've never done any sort of boxing or Tae Bo, so it's a lot of fun to have you guys here," she says. "I'm definitely the kind of person who likes to punch and kick real hard. I'm honestly like a kid today, really excited

for this and to have my new song out there. To me, it's about all women— young, old, middle age, me, my mom, my cousins. I love the idea of every woman feeling powerful and special. I love the way the song says that."

And with that, Billy takes the stage and the class begins to kick and punch its way to better health. After a few figure-it-out minutes, Chelsea gets her footwork down and starts slugging away in fine form. And if Ronda Rousey were here, she'd probably smile at that sight.

**JIM CASEY**







# GOING, GOING, GOES

## "ANYTHING GOES"

FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE

**WRITERS:** Felix McTeigue, Chris Tompkins, Craig Wiseman



Chris Tompkins



Craig Wiseman

## FABULOUS FELIX

Some of **FELIX McTEIGUE's** other cuts include the title track of Dallas Smith's Canadian Top 20 album *Jumped Right In* and Heidi Newfield's "Wreck You," from her 2008 debut solo album, *What Am I Waiting For*.

You don't have to live in Nashville to be a hit songwriter on the country charts. Just ask Felix McTeigue. The Vermont native only comes to Music City a handful of times throughout the year, but he makes the most of those trips by writing with friends like seasoned songwriter Chris Tompkins. "I'm kind of an outsider in some ways, so it's cool that they make enough time for me," says Felix.

Chris looks forward to making room in his schedule to write with Felix because of the outside influence he brings into the writing room. "When Felix and I settle on an idea, we enjoy the process of keeping it from sounding too much like other songs," says Chris. "We like to remove words and insert new twists on lines that you've already heard, basically."

While spitballing ideas, Chris came up with a line he thought was compelling: *Victoria's Secret ain't a secret no more*. The two songwriters began to flesh out the idea and continued to chip away at the song all day. When the session was over, they had a solid chorus and a few possible verses. Knowing that Felix's

availability in town was limited, Chris made some adjustments in his schedule for the following day, carving out a slice of time for him and Felix to complete the song and, in the process, adding a wild card to the deck. "I thought it was a really cool song, so I knew if we were going to finish it that I would have to see if my co-writer the following day would like to join us," recalls Chris.

That co-writer happened to be Craig Wiseman, who shares office space with Chris at his company, Big Loud Shirt. "Craig is just so great about putting words together, so I was thrilled that he wanted to be a part of this song," says Felix. "He played a big role in making sure every word made sense, but that it was said in a little bit of a different way that's been done before."

After listening to what Felix and Chris had started, Craig knew he was on board. "I loved the hook that they had," says Craig, who was inducted into the Nashville Songwriter Hall of Fame earlier this year. "It was interesting and it was different. It was a classic Chris Tompkins track."

The three writers finished "Anything Goes" and began the process of pitching it around town. While several artists liked the song, Florida Georgia Line was the first to put it on hold. The duo cut the song for their sophomore album and ultimately made it the title track, which would later become the album's fourth single.

"When I heard the final track, I thought FGL just took it way north, through the finish line and beyond," says Felix. "They really worked hard on that whole record, and I am so happy that I could have a part of the project with this song."

ALANNA CONAWAY





The week of Oct. 17, 2015

## TOP 25 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	-	<b>CASS COUNTY</b> DON HENLEY
2	-	<b>COLD BEER CONVERSATION</b> GEORGE STRAIT
3	-	<b>TANGLED UP</b> THOMAS RHETT
4	1	<b>KILL THE LIGHTS</b> LUKE BRYAN
5	6	<b>MONTEVALLO</b> SAM HUNT
6	2	<b>SOUTHERN DRAWL</b> ALABAMA
7	5	<b>ILLINOIS</b> BRETT ELDREDGE
8	8	<b>JEKYLL + HYDE</b> ZAC BROWN BAND
9	7	<b>THE OUTSIDERS</b> ERIC CHURCH
10	9	<b>ANYTHING GOES</b> FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
11	10	<b>PAIN KILLER</b> LITTLE BIG TOWN
12	11	<b>START HERE</b> MADDIE & TAE
13	-	<b>ON PURPOSE</b> CLINT BLACK
14	13	<b>ANGELS AND ALCOHOL</b> ALAN JACKSON
15	12	<b>OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT</b> JASON ALDEAN
16	3	<b>TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS</b> TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS
17	14	<b>JUST AS I AM</b> BRANTLEY GILBERT
18	16	<b>PAGEANT MATERIAL</b> KACEY MUSGRAVES
19	15	<b>NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL COUNTRY, VOLUME 8</b> • VARIOUS ARTISTS
20	19	<b>IGNITE THE NIGHT</b> CHASE RICE
21	18	<b>TRAVELLER</b> CHRIS STAPLETON
22	17	<b>WILD ONES</b> KIP MOORE
23	27	<b>DJANGO AND JIMMIE</b> WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
24	4	<b>COUNTRY EVOLUTION</b> HOME FREE
25	21	<b>SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE</b> JASON ISBELL

## TOP 25 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	<b>SAVE IT FOR A RAINY DAY</b> KENNY CHESNEY
2	3	<b>LOSE MY MIND</b> BRETT ELDREDGE
3	4	<b>STRIP IT DOWN</b> LUKE BRYAN
4	2	<b>JOHN COUGAR, JOHN DEERE, JOHN 3:16</b> • KEITH URBAN
5	5	<b>ANYTHING GOES</b> FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
6	8	<b>GONNA WANNA TONIGHT</b> CHASE RICE
7	6	<b>BREAK UP WITH HIM</b> OLD DOMINION
8	10	<b>LET ME SEE YA GIRL</b> COLE SWINDELL
9	7	<b>SMOKE BREAK</b> CARRIE UNDERWOOD
10	11	<b>FLY</b> MADDIE & TAE
11	12	<b>NOTHIN' LIKE YOU</b> DAN + SHAY
12	13	<b>GONNA</b> BLAKE SHELTON
13	14	<b>I'M COMIN' OVER</b> CHRIS YOUNG
14	15	<b>GONNA KNOW WE WERE HERE</b> JASON ALDEAN
15	16	<b>TOP OF THE WORLD</b> TIM MCGRAW
16	17	<b>BURNING HOUSE</b> CAM
17	19	<b>STAY A LITTLE LONGER</b> BROTHERS OSBORNE
18	21	<b>RUN AWAY WITH YOU</b> BIG & RICH
19	20	<b>ALREADY CALLIN' YOU MINE</b> PARMALEE
20	22	<b>DIBS</b> KELSEA BALLERINI
21	23	<b>I LOVE THIS LIFE</b> LOCASH
22	24	<b>I GOT THE BOY</b> JANA KRAMER
23	25	<b>21</b> HUNTER HAYES
24	26	<b>COUNTRY NATION</b> BRAD PAISLEY
25	28	<b>WE WENT</b> RANDY HOUSER

## TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	<b>SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE</b> JASON ISBELL
2	2	<b>SERVANT OF LOVE</b> PATTY GRIFFIN
3	3	<b>LOST TIME</b> DAVE ALVIN & PHIL ALVIN
4	4	<b>PAGEANT MATERIAL</b> KACEY MUSGRAVES
5	13	<b>PANHANDLE RAMBLER</b> JOE ELY
6	8	<b>TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS</b> TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS
7	10	<b>GATES OF GOLD</b> LOS LOBOS
8	6	<b>THE BLADE</b> ASHLEY MONROE
9	5	<b>WATKINS FAMILY HOUR</b> WATKINS FAMILY HOUR
10	16	<b>SOUTH BROADWAY ATHLETIC CLUB</b> BOTTLE ROCKETS

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART

## rdio TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY SONGS\*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	<b>ANTHEM</b> THOMAS RHETT
2	<b>STRIP IT DOWN</b> LUKE BRYAN
3	<b>RUNNIN' OUTTA MOONLIGHT</b> RANDY HOUSER
4	<b>BURNING HOUSE</b> CAM
5	<b>TAKE YOUR TIME</b> SAM HUNT

## TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY/AMERICANA/SOUTHERN ALBUMS\*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	<b>TANGLED UP</b> THOMAS RHETT
2	<b>CASS COUNTY</b> DON HENLEY
3	<b>NUMBER ONES</b> KENNY ROGERS
4	<b>SERVANT OF LOVE</b> PATTY GRIFFIN
5	<b>ILLINOIS</b> BRETT ELDREDGE

\*DATA FROM OCT. 5, 2015

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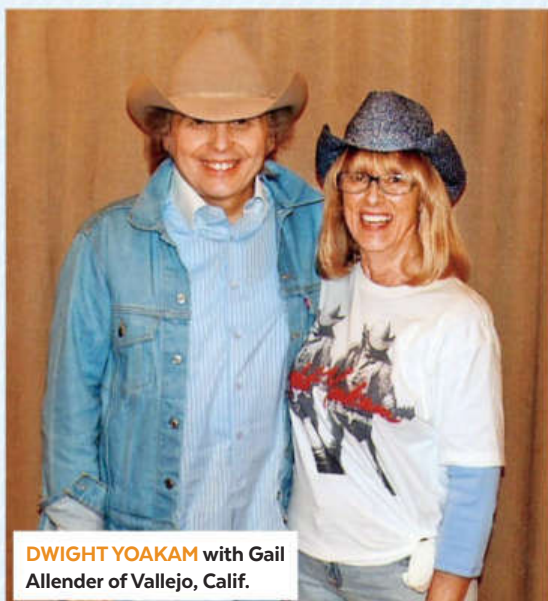
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Kaleb Angell of  
Lebanon, Conn.



Jewel Strause of Coateville,  
Pa., with **WILLIE NELSON**



Bobbi Child of Port Saint Lucie, Fla.,  
with **LINDSAY ELL**



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# WORDSEARCH

Compiled by John Reiman

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T L W H E R E I T A L L B E G A N L S T  
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G S K C I R D N E H T T O C S A Q H Y Y

... RIGHT KIND OF CRAZY  
TOUR  
ASHLEY GORLEY  
BLAKE SHELTON  
CAM  
CAN'T SAY NO  
CANAAN SMITH  
CHIEF AND JOY  
CHRIS DeSTEFANO  
CMA VOCAL DUO NOMINEES  
DAN SMYERS

DANNY ORTON  
HUNTER HAYES  
KELSEA BALLERINI  
NATURAL DAM, AR  
NINETEEN YOU AND ME  
NOTHIN' LIKE YOU  
PARKING BRAKE  
PLUS SIGN  
RESCUE DOGS  
SCOTT HENDRICKS

SHAY MOONEY  
SHOW YOU OFF  
STOP DROP AND ROLL  
TATTOO (YOUR NAME)  
TEN TIMES CRAZIER  
WARNER BROS. NASHVILLE  
WE'RE NOT INVISIBLE  
WEXFORD, PA  
WHAT YOU DO TO ME  
WHERE IT ALL BEGAN



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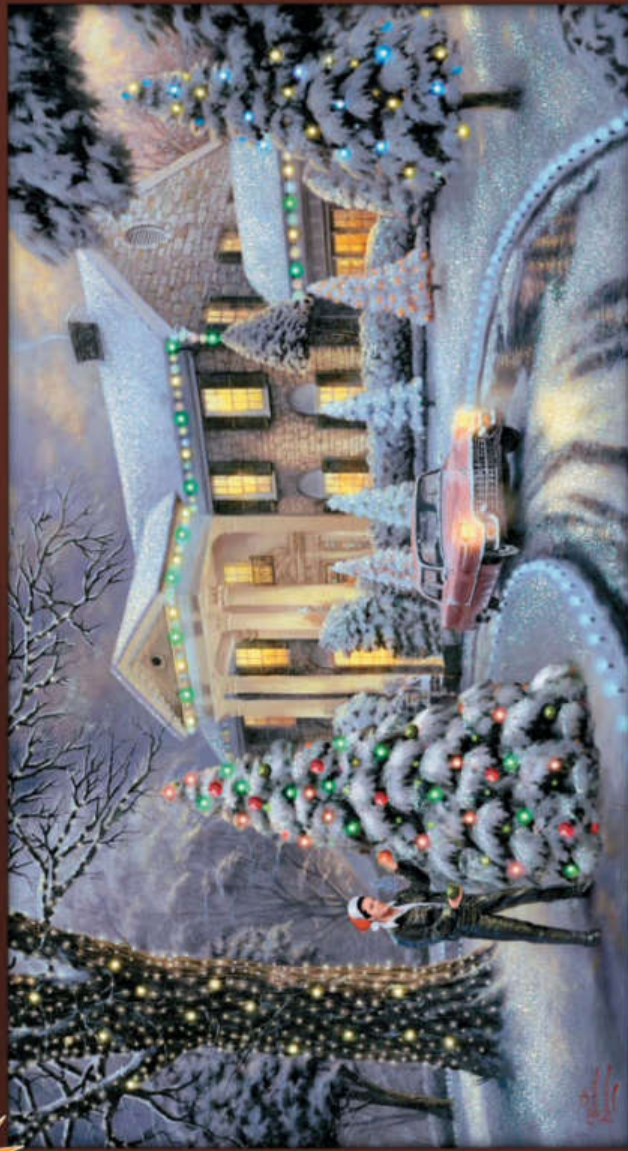
We need your submissions more than ever! Make up a list of words and phrases about a particular star, topic or theme related to country music. Email a list and recent, clear photo of yourself to [letters@countryweekly.com](mailto:letters@countryweekly.com) and type "Wordsearch" in the subject line or mail to **NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY Wordsearch, 506 2nd Ave. South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210.**

If we choose your list to make a Wordsearch puzzle, we'll publish your photo and pay you \$25! Sorry, but submitted photos cannot be returned.





# "Christmas at Graceland" by Thomas Kinkadee



Thomas Kinkadee  
Christmas at Graceland

## Bring the Lights of Graceland Home with a Genuine Illuminated Canvas Print

Now, for the first time ever, the King of Rock 'n Roll® takes center stage in a beloved portrait from famed artist Thomas Kinkadee that authentically recreates the lights of Graceland in an artist's canvas print that illuminates from within!

Thomas Kinkadee's original portrait of Graceland not only captured the actual lighted display of Elvis' home at Christmas, it also caught the attention and adoration of his many fans. It features 40 color-changing lights on the trees, 14 golden fiber optics on the tree trunk, two golden fiber optics in the headlights, and golden lights that illuminate the windows. This spectacular edition has

been designed to glisten with the authentic lights of Graceland at Christmas and the magic of Elvis' favorite time of the year.

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The lights on the Christmas trees change color, thanks to the brilliance of fiber-optic lighting.

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*Genuine canvas print creates the beauty of the original artist's painting*

*Marvel at the distinctive illumination of a Thomas Kinkadee painting as never before with more than 55 strategically-placed lights*

*Hand-applied glitter sparkles on Graceland's rooftop, lawn and tree tops*

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Mrs. Mr. Ms.

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City

State

Zip

**01-19098-001-E08102**

\*Plus \$14.99 shipping and service. Limited-edition presentation restricted to 120 crafting days. Please allow 4-8 weeks after initial payment for shipment. Sales subject to product availability and order acceptance.



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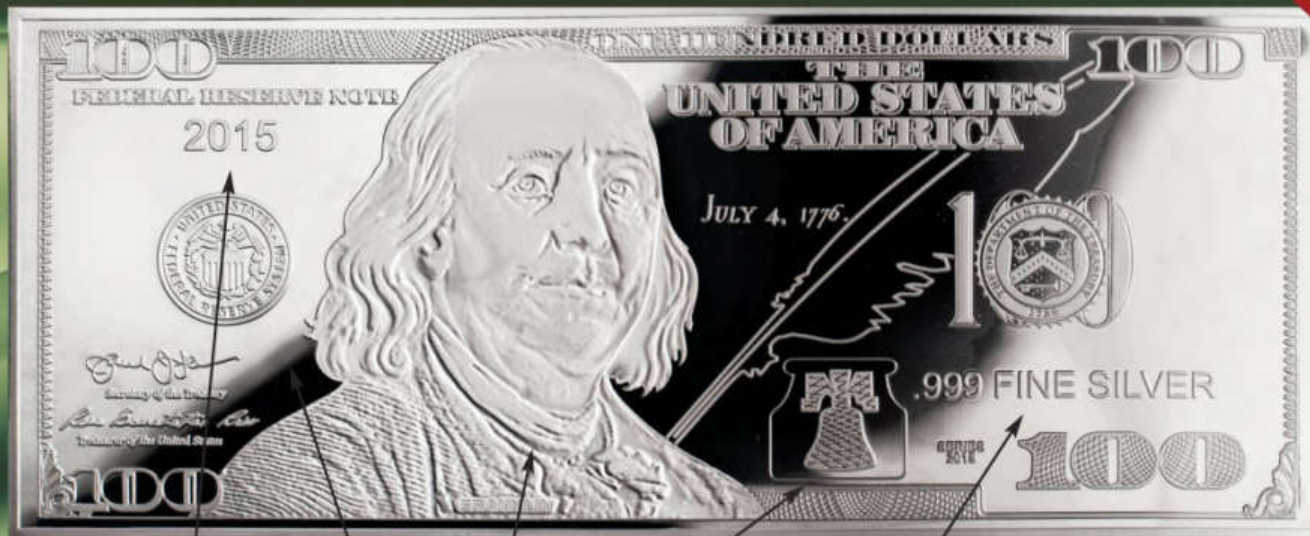


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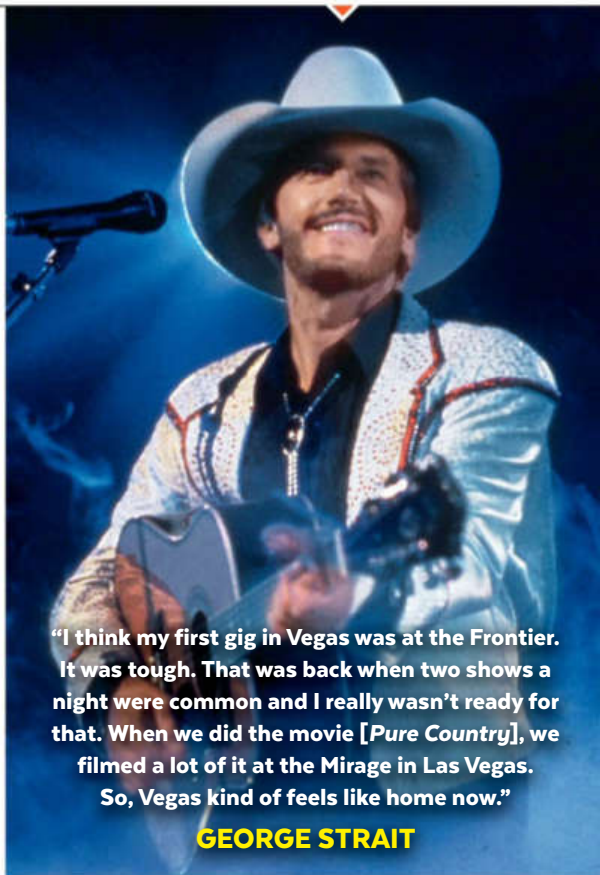
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"I think my first gig in Vegas was at the Frontier. It was tough. That was back when two shows a night were common and I really wasn't ready for that. When we did the movie [Pure Country], we filmed a lot of it at the Mirage in Las Vegas. So, Vegas kind of feels like home now."

**GEORGE STRAIT**

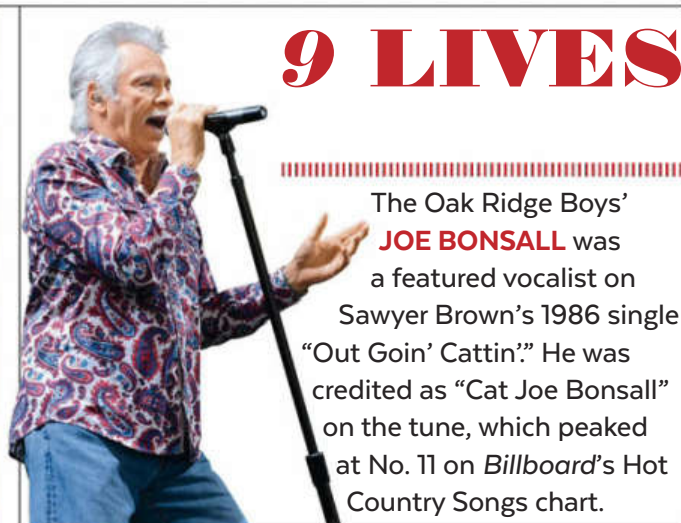


## GOOBER COUNTRY

There's a sackful of young country talent hailing from the great state of Georgia, which is known as the "Goober State" for its peanut production. Georgia natives **THOMAS RHETT**, 25, **TYLER HUBBARD**, 28, **BRANTLEY GILBERT**, 30, **COLE SWINDELL**, 32, and **KIP MOORE**, 35, are all less than a decade apart in age.

## FIRST RATE

**CRAIG MORGAN**, a 15-year U.S. Army veteran, served as a member of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions—infantry divisions known for their air assaults. In the 1998 movie *Saving Private Ryan*, title character James Ryan, played by Matt Damon, was also a member of the 101st.



## 9 LIVES

The Oak Ridge Boys' **JOE BONSTALL** was a featured vocalist on Sawyer Brown's 1986 single "Out Goin' Cattin'." He was credited as "Cat Joe Bonsall" on the tune, which peaked at No. 11 on *Billboard*'s Hot Country Songs chart.



## GREAT GENES

It sounds like country newcomer **RAINEY QUALLEY** comes by her singing chops honestly. Her mother, actress **ANDIE MACDOWELL**, held a pretty good tune in the 1996 movie *Michael*, as she sang "Sittin' by the Side of the Road," which was also featured on the soundtrack.

## STURGILL SIMPSON BY THE NUMBERS

- 1** 2015 **GRAMMY NOMINATION**
- 2** 2015 **AMERICANA MUSIC AWARDS**
- 3** consecutive **SOLD-OUT RYMAN SHOWS** (Oct. 30–Nov. 1)
- 4** days to record live-to-tape 2014's **METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY MUSIC**
- 5** late-night talk show gigs: **DAVID LETTERMAN (2), JIMMY FALLON (2), SETH MEYERS (1)**





A woman with blonde hair in a braid, wearing a brown cowboy hat, a blue denim shirt, a long beige cardigan with fringe, a patterned poncho, dark jeans with a large silver belt buckle, and tall brown cowboy boots. She is standing in a barn with wooden walls and horseshoes hanging on the wall.

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